

HER FAITHFUL KNIGHT

BY
GERTRUDE WARDEN





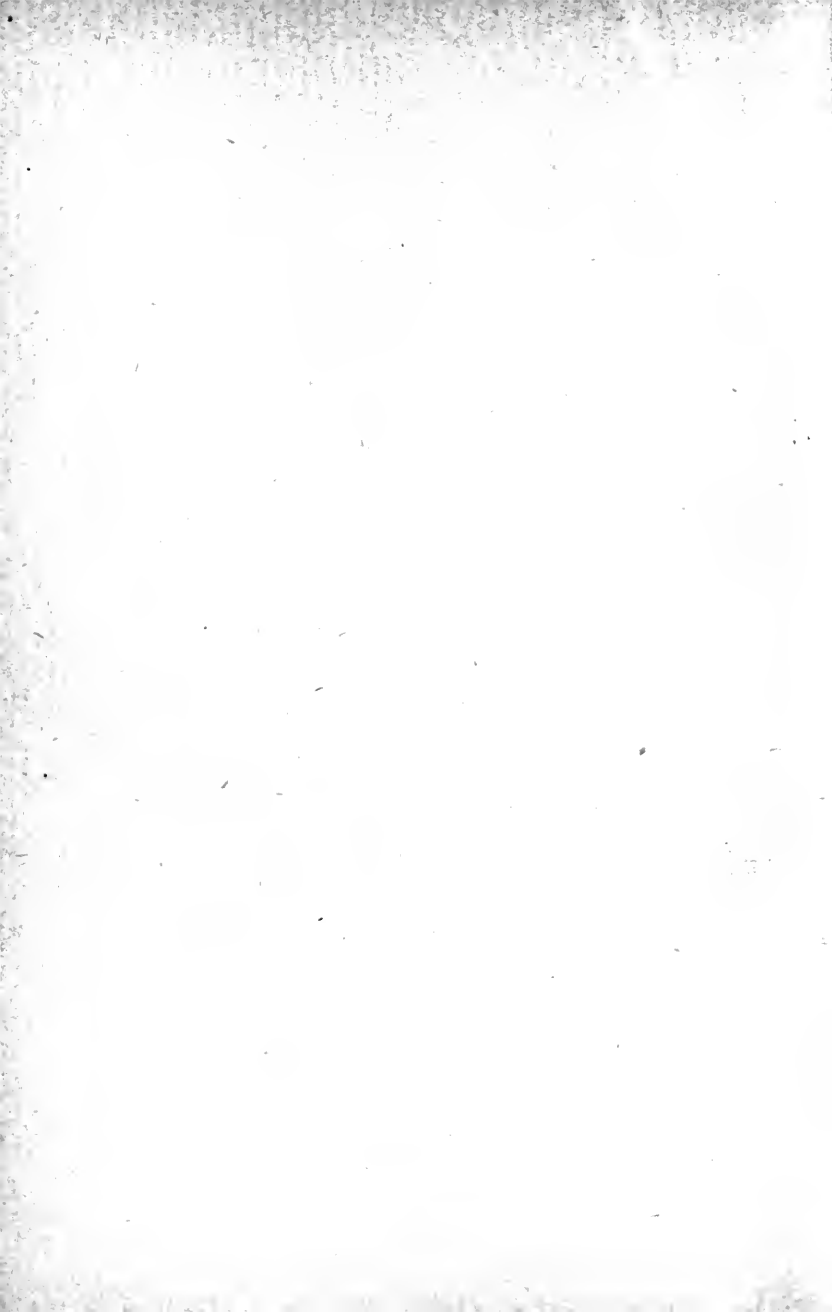
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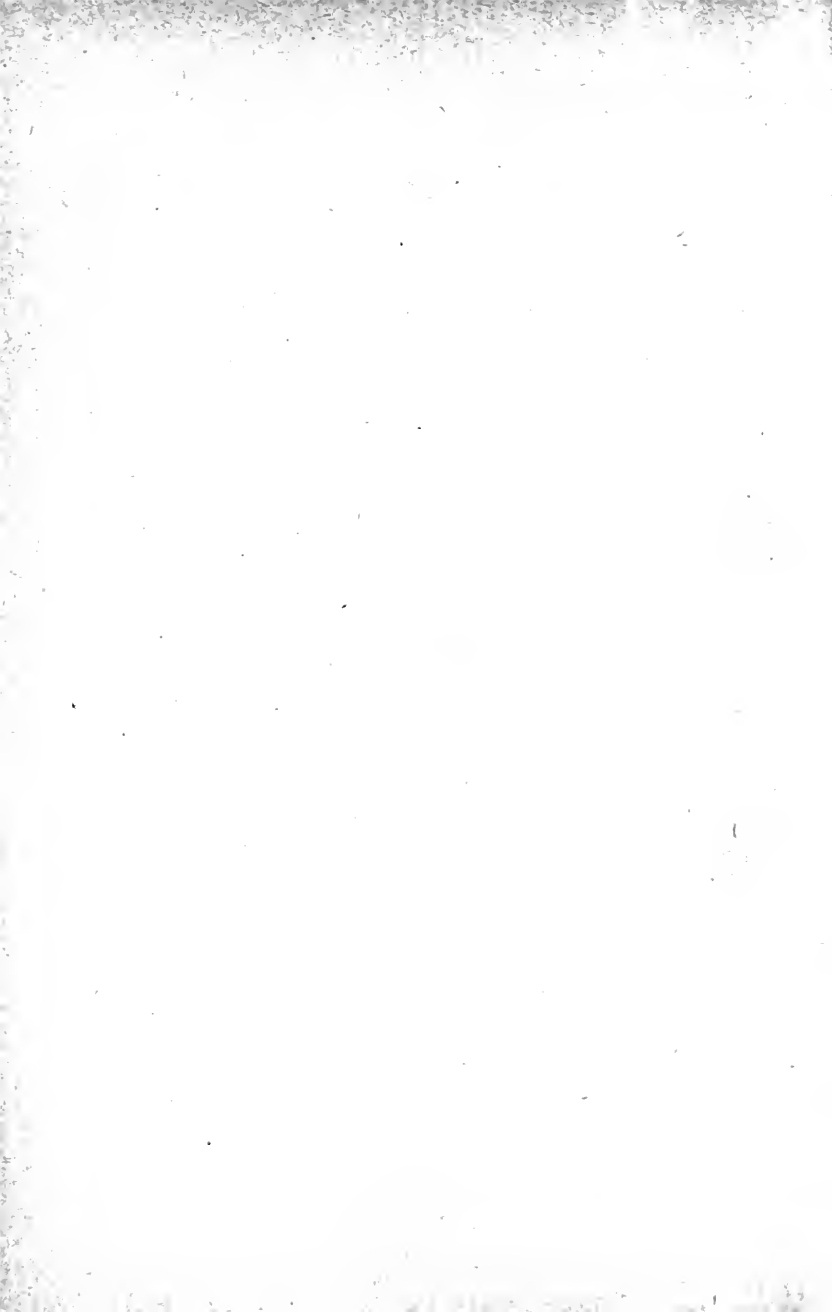
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Her Faithful Knight

BY

GERTRUDE WARDEN

AUTHOR OF

"A STAGE HEROINE," "IN THE DARK ARCHES,"
"WHOSE WAS THE CRIME?" ETC.



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HER FAITHFUL KNIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUR AND THE WOMAN.

In no sense of the word can Great Russell street be called a cheerful thoroughfare—especially on a wet day.

The British Museum pigeons, huddled together in the space before the grim, gray building, sacred to learning and the arts, flap their soiled, wet wings disconsolately; they are sober-minded birds at the best of times, perpetually weighted by a consciousness of their educational surroundings. In the rain they look only a little less bedraggled than the dreary file of waterproofed and mackintoshed readers, splashing their way toward the shallow steps and heavy portico in search of food for their hungry minds.

In fine weather it is not difficult to distinguish between the patrons of the reading-room and the art students who haunt the sculpture galleries. Among the latter a percentage is inclined to giggling and whispering, to beads, bows, curled fringes, pigtails, and a chastened levity of spirit. Undersized youths between the ages of sixteen and six-and-twenty; ill-dressed, unshaven, and apparently unwashed, occupy a considerable amount of these young ladies' attention.

On a wet May morning, Aylmer Read, a big, fair-haired young man of seven-and-twenty, sauntering up

Great Russell street under an umbrella, thinking out an article he meant to elaborate by the aid of certain volumes in the Museum library, beheld none of these social amenities, and decided that a plainer or more depressed looking lot of people, even for a rainy day, than these students and readers, he had never yet considered..

"What ugly girls! Upon my word, they have need to study the beautiful! It should lead to smashed looking-glasses at home, though."

After seven years spent in the chief newspaper office of a northern manufacturing town, Aylmer Read had seized the chance of a position in London, and rather hoped on his return thither to find every provincial goose exchanged for a metropolitan swan. Born and reared in London, he did not hope to see the streets paved with gold, but what he did eagerly anticipate was a larger intellectual life, greater possibilities for cultured social intercourse, and, chiefly, for acquaintanceship with women in his own rank of life, who combined education with grace and beauty.

Up in Clofield his brother journalists had mated contentedly with their landladies' daughters, with barmaids, or with chance young women encountered on their yearly outings; and these ladies had, according to their several lights, cooked and mended and managed for them, provided them with families, nagged at them, gossiped about them, cordially admired their abilities and deplored their increasing love for strong drinks, and made wretched the lives of sundry overworked and underfed "helps" in the kitchen and the nursery.

With such a helpmeet, Aylmer Read, at seven-and-twenty, with a digestion which so far defied bad cookery, could by no means be satisfied. Although he lived in the latter end of the nineteenth century, he cherished feelings of romance and chivalry. Outwardly calm, matter of

fact, and conventional, he alone suspected his own latent capability for making a fool of himself about a woman. In Clofield his work had been ill paid, his time fully occupied, and the women he met few and unattractive. Here in London all these conditions were altered. He was to have more money and more leisure, and the exact psychological moment had come when, given the woman with the necessary magnetic power over him, he was bound to fall fathoms deep in love with her.

The birds of Venus were shaking the raindrops from their soot begrimed feathers in the Museum courtyard. Possibly the Sea-born herself may have hovered above the fog and rain-clouds in the vicinity of the Parthenon fragments, and, ever intent on securing votaries and victims, may have directed Aylmer Read's vision up a certain side street, down which a woman in blue serge was coming toward him.

The woman was young and shapely; she carried herself well and gracefully, even though hampered by an umbrella, a handbag, and a skirt which was too long at the back, and had to be lifted above a pair of beautiful feet in cheap walking shoes. To be graceful under such circumstances was in itself an exceptional thing, and denoted a unique equality in this young woman, distinguishing her among others of her age and sex. To the injury of his peace of mind, Aylmer had to learn that this woman could not ever look ungainly, so admirably symmetrical were her proportions. While yet her face was concealed by the umbrella his heart began to beat a very little faster, so certain was he that her features would prove as wholly charming as her gait and carriage. A gust of wind came at his unspoken prayer, and, as she crossed the street and passed close to him, her umbrella was blown sufficiently on one side to enable him to take a long look at her face.

She was very beautiful, as he knew she would be, pale and fair, and somewhat thin, but not unhealthy looking; in age, apparently twenty, and in expression, serious and a little sad. Her eyes were gray and luminous, set off by dark lashes and straight, well marked eyebrows; her features were delicate and her lips very firmly closed. Light brown hair that only asked for sunlight to shine golden, crowned the pale, pink fairness of her skin; in figure she was rather tall, and larger in the waist than a fashionable dressmaker would have permitted. Her clothes were cheap and plain; shabby and dowdy they might have appeared on a less beautiful woman; but in Aylmer Read's eyes the cestus of Venus could not have more admirably set off her charms.

He knew instinctively that she was going to the Museum, and this not by reason of any resemblance between her and the students and readers who had gone before, but because he felt romantically certain that she was destined to come under his particular notice, and to play from henceforth an important part in his life.

The long look he had taken into her face seemed to him to establish already a relationship between them, although she had passed by as though unaware of his presence. A woman so beautiful as she imperatively demanded a chivalrous protector to follow at a distance and guard her from the undesirable attentions her attractions might provoke in a great city. Already he had forgotten the object which brought him to Great Russell street, but he followed the beautiful ill-shod feet across the courtyard and past the dripping, shining pigeons up the steps and into the Museum.

Here a check awaited him. The beautiful unknown wrote her name in the students' book and disappeared to remove her hat. By this time Aylmer recalled the fact that he was a reader and not a student, and that his way

lay far from hers. He was a man of resource, and accustomed by his sub-editorial work on a great newspaper to keep his wits about him in an emergency. There was only one course open to him—he must become an art student.

Aylmer Read could not draw. He could criticise other men's drawings, but would have been sore put to it to rival the productions of even an inferior pavement artist in colored chalks. He resolved to make a tour of the sculpture galleries to discover for himself how much talent was displayed by the embryo Raphaels and Michael Angelos assembled there, and to learn whether such elementary attempts as his were likely to prove would be startlingly conspicuous.

The students were trooping through the galleries, making first for a room off the corridors devoted to Assyrian bas reliefs in search of the easels, drawing boards, and oblong wooden boxes which served as seats and were stacked there. Aylmer's fair lady came thither in course of time. She had removed her hat and scarf, and the light from the glass roofing fell on her hair which even on this dullest of days lent color and brightness to the scene. Fine, glossy, and abundant, typically English gold-brown hair it was, beautifully brushed, and twisted into shining coils with care more suggestive of a French than an Anglo-Saxon maiden. The outline of her broad, white forehead was softened by a wave of fair hair, but Aylmer's lady wore no set "fringe," and he found himself wondering how he could ever have admired any girl whose coiffure was destitute of parting and who sported a curled "bang."

She passed him again, easel in hand, on her way to the Greek sculptures. Following her was a sharpfaced undersized youth, against whom Aylmer instantly conceived a violent dislike, for he was carrying her drawing board

and her boxes, and winking in triumph at a group of his companions. That anything in masculine shape should wink while doing her a service was an outrage. It was clearly necessary that Aylmer should at once become a student in order that she might be waited upon in a proper spirit of reverence.

The gallery in which Aylmer's lady took her place was long and narrow, at one end was a fine figure of Hermes, and this it was that she had come to copy.

Aylmer strolled through the galleries, feigning deep interest in the broken statuary, and unconsciously exciting much fluttering attention in the minds of the loose-haired, corsetless young ladies, who, having taken up their study of the human form from antique models, could duly appreciate his fine proportions.

"Isn't he splendid? A figure like Hermes. And his head is beautifully put on his neck."

"He'll grow beefy when he's middle-aged. Those big, fair men always do."

"All the same, wouldn't you like to be as tall and broad as that, Mr. Smith?"

"No, thynks. It's all wyste material. A small body and a big brain is what's wanted if one has to make one's way in the world."

Such were among the comments which Aylmer's appearance excited among the art students. But Mr. Smith, the sharp-faced cockney youth who had been the last speaker, looked, as he was, very good-natured, and presently Aylmer, after making a tour of the Elgin marbles, addressed himself to him for information.

"I should very much like to make some studies from these statutes," he said. "May I ask what qualifications are required for students here?"

"You don't want to get into the Akedemy, I suppose?" suggested Mr. Smith. "Most of us are droring for passes

into the Akedemy schools, you know. Once we get in, which 'arf of us won't, we hope to be sent to Rome on account of our remarkable talent."

"And what would you do in Rome?" inquired Aylmer, amused by the humorous little cockney—albeit he had been guilty of winking as he carried beauty's drawing board.

"Oh, tike in art at the pores, and come 'ome Corregios. Seems a large order, don't it?"

Mr. Smith was most ready with his information. If Aylmer obtained a ticket there was no reason why he should not "dror" statues all day if his tastes lay in that direction. The slight measure of proficiency which was needed in order to insure admittance as a student was a drawback in his case, certainly, but might be overcome.

"As to your droring badly," said Mr. Smith, "lots of us do thet. I've seen that blessed Satyr with cymbals caricatured to that extent it was enough to mike him turn on his pedestal. Get your ticket, and you're free to spoil as much good droring paper as the best of us."

Aylmer thanked him for his advice and encouragement and made his way back to the room where the girl in the blue serge was copying the Hermes. Standing in the doorway he could watch her profile without attracting attention. As she became absorbed in her work he noted an eagerness in her expression quite unlike the thoughtful sadness which he had first seen in her face.

The hands with which she dexterously wielded charcoal, chalk and bread, were slender, well shaped and strong, and something in the curve of her wrist inspired in Aylmer an insane wish to cover it with kisses. The back of her neck, just above the collar of her gown, was likewise distracting, of a warm, creamy fairness, shaded by stray tendrils of soft, fair hair. It seemed wonderful to Aylmer that the male students in her vicinity should

waste their pencils on unresponsive marble with this lovely model before their eyes. He was even conscious of surprise at the unmoved calm of the curator who sat in a corner of the gallery nursing his wand, and hardly glancing in the fair-haired lady's direction. An overpowering desire to make her look at him, to meet the full gaze of her gray eyes fixed on his, impelled Aylmer to walk a little way down the gallery, and then pause for a moment in front of a marble group near her seat.

As he did so the girl turned her head a little to the right, and their eyes met for the first time. It seemed to him that no woman had ever looked at him before, and that they two were as much alone and separate from the rest as the first man and first woman together in Eden. She looked at him half wonderingly under contracted brows, as though trying to recollect where she had seen him before. Her eyes were very brilliant, of a peculiar hazel-gray that looked almost green in the strongest light; his were brown, and in their direct, steadfast gaze the least of vain women could have read something stronger than admiration, while the most modest need not have shrunk from their unspoken homage. Clearly, the lady in blue was not annoyed with him for staring at her, for even when, with a deep blush, she looked away from him to her drawing board there was nothing in her expression that betokened displeasure.

That long look, given and received, was to Aylmer's thinking a most hopeful beginning to his courtship. At least, she would remember him again, and if his eyes possessed half the eloquence he desired, she would know that he had fallen in love with her.

Such a first impression was too precious to be interfered with, and after a few more inquiries at the entrance as to the coveted student's ticket, Aylmer Read left the building.

CHAPTER II.

A MOONLIGHT WALK.

Prepared with the necessary ticket, Aylmer Read a few days later went to the British Museum, inscribed his name in the students' book, selected his easel and board, and strolled down the galleries in search of something easy to draw.

To his intense disappointment and vexation the divinity in blue serge did not appear, and after wasting three hours in making strange hieroglyphics on the paper before him and promptly rubbing them out before anybody saw them, the new student left the galleries in disgust, and did not return until two days later. In the interim he had searched the neighborhood for her in vain; but on a sunny morning in early June he entered the Hermes Gallery and noted with delight how the strong light from above made an aureole of a girl's bright hair, as she bent, seated, over a sketchbook.

As though to add a finishing touch to his utter subjugation, she wore new shoes, cut low in front, and a pink cabbage rose pinned near the neck of her gown, contrasting with the paler pink fairness of her face. She did not appear to notice his entrance, and went on quietly sketching in pencil a broken statuette of Eros, while Aylmer, indifferent as to his subject, gravely set up his easel before the bust called "Clytie."

Hardly, however, could he even pretend to study the features of Phoebus' unhappy love except to compare them with those of the girl in blue. "Clytie" was fat and

commonplace, her brow was too low for intelligence, and her locks were evidently artificially curled. The face of the girl in blue, on the other hand, grew momentarily more interesting by reason of the mingled strength and weakness which he seemed to read there. Her unconsciousness of his presence he discovered early to be a sham; more than once she looked at him curiously when she thought him fully occupied by his work—only once, though, did she meet his eyes, and then she instantly affected to be absorbed in a piece of sculpture beyond him.

Her face as a possible index to her character was perplexing and contradictory. Those quickly glancing, brilliant eyes, the color of which seemed to constantly vary, were sympathetic, and would have been even coquettish but for a set, resolute hardness in the closing of the beautiful mouth. The chin was white, well rounded and eminently kissable, curving in temptingly under the lower lip; but the pure lines of her profile were almost coldly classic in outline. Cold, too, was her bearing, and very cold, even icy, her voice when a certain would-be Lothario among her fellow-students tried to enter into conversation with her on the pretext of some borrowed bread.

She did not stay very long in the gallery, but having completed her sketch, left her seat and walked away to another part of the building. Something fell from her sketchbook as she rose, and, after being dragged a little way in the train of her gown, became free of it within a yard of Aylmer's feet. It was a cabinet photograph, and as Aylmer lifted it from the ground with the intention of returning it, he saw at once that it was a portrait of herself, and that underneath was written in a large, clear lady's hand: "Miss Phyllis Knight."

The picture did not do her justice; but it lay in Aylmer's hand; no one was looking, and all is fair in love. These considerations influenced him as he deliberately

turned it over and read the number of the card and the name of the photographer on the back. Should he place it in her hands at once? It would seem a good opportunity for addressing her, but Aylmer decided that the right moment for so doing had not yet arrived. He had no wish to be treated in the same frigid style as the gentleman of the bread incident; he would wait his time, and meantime place the portrait on the seat where its owner had been sitting.

Meanwhile he could not wait until he got home before writing to the provincial photographer, whose address he had mentally registered. Quitting the Museum, he struck into Oxford street, and ordering lunch, and pen, ink and paper, at the nearest restaurant, he requested the man to send, in return for the P. O. O. inclosed the portrait of Miss Phyllis Knight, of which he gave the number, and to inform him whether he had taken any other pictures of the lady. Once this letter was stamped and posted, Aylmer returned to the study of art in the highest spirits. The Hermes Gallery appeared deserted, save for the curator dozing over his wand in his seat in the corner. The luncheon hour was, as a rule, devoted to sandwiches and strolling visits. The afternoon was hot and inducive to indolence. But before one easel a tall, charming figure stood, with her back to Aylmer, her hands clasped behind her, her fair head a little inclined to one side, considering the work before her; and with a strong inclination to laugh, Aylmer realized that the girl in blue serge was criticising his attempts to draw the "Clytie."

The gallery was perfectly still and quiet. Aylmer advanced slowly and softly, and the girl in blue thought she was alone, save for the sleeping curator. As she contemplated Mr. Read's attempt to reproduce the Clytie's features, her sense of humor overcame her; she burst into

a low laugh of intense amusement, girlish, spontaneous and infectious. In the middle of it she turned her head sharply at some slight sound, and found Aylmer standing a few feet behind her, laughing also. In a moment she had blushed deeply, composed her features and walked sedately away with head erect, humming a tune in the most indifferent way in the world. But her laughing face had been a revelation of lovely gaiety and shining white teeth to the young man, and he realized instantly that her coldness of look and manner were assumed, and that under that veneer of dignity she was nothing more than a light-hearted girl.

Not another glimpse of her did he catch that afternoon, during the course of which he received some candid criticism on his debut as an art student from the irrepressible Mr. Smith.

"So that's your idea of the Clytie," observed that young man, arriving inopportunistly, before Aylmer had had time to completely erase his efforts. "A bit 'off' in the matter of droring, isn't it? We've been having a discussion about you, some of the fellers and I. Some of 'em think you dror so badly you must be founding a new school. One chap thinks you're a private detective, waiting here to spot somebody; but as none of us have done anything worse than leave our washing bills unpaid, that don't seem likely either. Unless Miss Knight's murdered some one who was trying to mike up to her. She looks as if she could do it sometimes."

"Who is Miss Knight?"

"Dont' tell me you don't know the nime of the prettiest girl in the galleries. The one with the fair 'air and the rippin' figger in blue serge, of course. The girls here call her 'Diana the Disdainful.' She don't dror at all badly, and earns her living by it, which is more than most of us can do. Does designs and sketches and things, not

'arf bad some of 'em; but don't she think a lot of 'erself, that's all! The others are all 'ugging each other, and kissing, and arm round each other, and telling spiteful stories about each other all day. But she, she don't take any more notice of 'em than if they were so many flies. She isn't my style—too much of the stined glass window line for me. I like something a bit lively, that can cheek you back. But there's no denying that her modeling's first rate and her flesh tints simply A 1."

Aylmer subdued a great longing to take Mr. Smith by the scruff of his neck and summarily eject him from the Museum. In order to divert his sacrilegious talk to some less precious topic he gravely informed his cockney acquaintance that he fully intended taking up art as a profession, and relied upon his total inability to draw as his most promising stock in trade.

"I shall call myself an impressionist," he said. "I shall get a schoolboy nephew of mine, who has a box of paints, to color my designs. Then I shall put them in eccentric frames, hire a gallery, and give a 'one man' show. If I am remonstrated with, I shall say I only paint as I see. The new journalists will discover that I am an artist of strong natural genius and individuality, who has the courage to cast aside the trammels and conventions which hamper art in England."

Mr. Smith laughed and winked. The new student wasn't a bad sort, he decided, and forthwith marked his approval by asking the loan of half a crown. It was patent that the farce of art studies could not be kept up much longer, and that Aylmer's one object in playing it, the chance of making the acquaintance of the girl in blue, must be speedily accomplished if he wished to spare her fellow students' chaffing comments.

Chance, as some would have termed it, or fate, as Aylmer himself considered it, unexpectedly assisted him.

His sub-editorial work on a London daily newspaper kept him employed from a little before nine every evening until about four on the following morning. At the present time he was staying in bachelor apartments situated conveniently near his club off the Strand and the office of his newspaper in Fleet street. Saturdays were entirely free, and on the following day, which was a Saturday, Aylmer was asked to appear for an absent dramatic critic at the first performance of a new play at a fashionable comedy theatre not far from Piccadilly Circus. He was glad of the work as a change from the office routine, although at this present time he was so deeply in love that he would rather have spent the evening in roaming the streets in the neighborhood of the Museum, in the hope of meeting the lady of his thoughts, than have enjoyed the finest play ever performed on any stage.

Perhaps, in consequence of this exceptional frame of mind, the new piece failed to interest him. There was not enough love in it, and the leading lady was extremely unlike his ideal in appearance.

"Either the piece and the acting are mediocre," thought Aylmer, "or this love is making such a fool of me as to incapacitate me from enjoying anything in life."

He had fully made up his mind to ask Miss Knight to marry him on the first possible opportunity; but such a request requires a little leading up to, and her bearing was so fenced about with chilling dignity that he dared not injure his possible chances by appearing officious and premature. Under this system, Aylmer, a naturally pleasant tempered man, was growing absent-minded, capitious and irritable. Her image dominated his dreams, spoiled his meals, and never for a moment left his waking mind. He was conscious that such a state of things could not go on, and longed to bring matters to a crisis. Who and what she was, what position in life her parents and

relations occupied, what was her history, her education—on all these subjects Aylmer was as thoroughly indifferent as only a man of strong and long-repressed feelings, thoroughly in love for the first time, can be. He did not suppose the gray-eyed girl an angel, but he knew that she was the first woman he had ever met capable of inspiring in him an overmastering passion, and that, as a consequence, she must be his wife.

Through the course of the more or less trivial story which was being represented before him by ladies in extravagantly priced gowns, with many smart speeches to deliver which only the older members of the company made audible to the body of the house, Aylmer Read planned in his head a dozen different ways by which he could make himself known to Phyllis Knight, and chafed at the conventions of the age in which he lived as contrasted with the free and easy wooing practiced in the brave days of old.

Between the third and fourth acts he smoked a cigarette in the broad street on which the front of the theatre opened, and thought out the matter.

"In a primitive community I should merely have to squat at the door of her father's wigwam, mention my request, give the old gentleman some little present of oxen, or some other useful trifle, and bear my bride away. As it is, I absolutely stand hour after hour within a few yards of her and dare not even speak to her. It is a monstrous absurdity."

He strolled along the moonlit thoroughfare, his overcoat open, his hands clasped behind him, thinking. Down a side street, at right angles with the front of the theatre, and which led round to the stage door, a young woman was hurrying; a thick, black veil concealed her features, but the beauty of her figure was clearly shown by her close-fitting blue serge gown, and under her bon-

net bright fair hair shone in the light from the street lamps by the way.

Something of the pose of her head and the quick grace of her movements attracted Aylmer's attention. He told himself that his thoughts were so set upon one particular woman that he was ready to detect a resemblance to her where none existed; but he crossed the road in her track in order to get a better look at her.

As she turned into Waterloo place, three young men in evening dress, walking arm in arm, came round the corner so quickly as to almost run into her. Instead of letting her pass on, they blocked her way, overwhelming her with unnecessary apologies. As Aylmer came nearer he could see that she carried a small portfolio under her arm, and at sight of it his heart began to thump against his side. Nearer yet he came, covering the ground with long strides. The group ahead were close under the light of a gas lamp, and the three men who, if not exactly intoxicated, had at least been dining freely, were clearly visible to Aylmer. The eldest among them, a red-faced, gray-whiskered man, with bold, bloodshot eyes, peered into the girl's face, complimented her upon her looks, and as she tried to brush past him, laid a detaining hand upon her arm. The girl shook him off with a little cry of indignation, which had scarcely left her lips when she was joined by a tall, broadly built young man in evening dress, and a light overcoat, who drew her hand through his arm and turned threateningly upon her tormentors.

"May I see you to a cab, Miss Knight?" he said, as the men reeled away, laughing. "The streets of London at eleven o'clock are not pleasant for an unattended lady. I am so glad I happened to see you. Being a fellow student of yours at the British Museum, I felt I had a right to protect you from annoyance."

"Mr. Read!" she exclaimed, looking up at him wonderingly.

At least, she had taken the trouble to find out his name, and that of itself was an encouraging sign.

"I was seeing the new piece," he explained. "I was smoking a cigarette outside when I caught sight of you crossing the street. It is very late for you to be out. You will let me see you to your home, will you not?"

"Thank you, I am really quite able to take care of myself," she said, in her little cold manner, withdrawing her hand from his arm. "Please don't let me take you from the theatre. The last act had not begun when I left. I was sketching the dresses in the green-room and the curtain will hardly have risen yet. I know my way perfectly and am not likely to be annoyed again."

Her voice, in spite of the studied restraint of its accents, delighted him. It was eminently the voice of a lady, sweet and low-pitched, and wholly free from the shrill and unpleasing inflection at that time popular among would-be "smart" folk.

"I can't leave you now," he said, gently. "I must decline to be dismissed until I have put you in your cab or omnibus."

"I cannot ever afford to take a cab," she returned, simply, "and I generally walk until my omnibus fare is two pence."

"Let me come with you as far as the two-penny limit," he urged. "Why, Miss Knight, should you treat me as a roaring lion, seeking whom I may devour, simply because I am a man and you are a young lady? If you insist on a formal introduction, I will supply it. My name is Aylmer Read; my father is dead; my mother has married again. He was a writer; I am a journalist. For seven years I lived at Clofield, and for about as many weeks I have been

on the staff of the Daily Post in London. My duties begin about nine p. m. and finish about four a. m. I lodge in Hereford street, am a member of the Wigwam Club, owe no man anything, have in London no relations and very few friends, and am entirely my own master. Also, I have never been in any sense a gay Lothario, and I wish I had a sister that she might tell you that I reverence women."

Aylmer Read's tones were deep and mellow, as befitted his large, deep-chested frame. Miss Knight listened to them with a sense of pleasure, and had she been the least vain of women she could scarcely have failed to be touched by the gentle and even tender cadence of his voice as he uttered her name. She let him walk on by her side a few moments, and then said quietly:

"Thank you for your frankness, but I am not going to emulate it. No doubt it is absurd for me," she added, rather bitterly, "to have any conventions left, since I am less than nobody, and very poor. But I used to have parents and friends once, and lived in a great house, surrounded by servants and beautiful things to look at, to eat, and to wear. I actually drove daily in a carriage, too, and rode my own horse in the Row. Whereas now I am glad to walk until my omnibus fare is two pence. But I don't think mine is a singular case in these days when most people live beyond their incomes. Only the children born with silver spoons in their mouths come to look upon them as their right, and never properly appreciate the flavor of pewter."

She had a demure little way of making any remark approaching the humorous that charmed her companion. In spite of her assumed prim coldness there was an intense femininity about her that would have made even a plain woman attractive to a man. Her eyes and voice were appealing and sympathetic, even, if her words were

meant to be matter of fact and hard, and the longer the two went on talking the more soft and natural her manner became.

"Are you getting on well with your art studies?" he asked. "I should think it must be very difficult to really make a living by designs."

"It is," she assented, readily. "But luckily I work very quickly, and lately hand-painted cards and albums have been the fashion. The black and white I can do at night, and as I cannot afford models, whenever I have an hour to spare I draw from the antique at the Museum."

"I am afraid," he said, with imperturbable gravity, "that you did not admire my rendering of the Clytie which I found you examining yesterday?"

She glanced at him quickly. Then she laughed.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Read," she said, "but I suppose, as you are a writer, you are composing articles about the Museum, and only pretend to draw? Isn't that why you come to the galleries?"

"No," he answered, steadily. "That is not my reason. I became an art student so that I might meet you."

She did not seem nearly so much surprised as he expected. They were walking along Piccadilly by the Green Park. Lights in cabs and carriages stretched in a long line before them like a bright caterpillar up and down the slope, but not many pedestrians passed them. Miss Knight stopped short in her walk.

"Mr. Read," she said, gravely, but without acrimony, "I shall be very much disappointed in you if you take advantage of this accidental meeting to talk in a way I do not like."

"Miss Knight," he said, "I am sorry if you do not like what I say, but I must speak the truth. The chief wish of my life is to know you and become your friend."

"You will never be that if—if you try to talk sentiment with me."

"Have I been very sentimental yet?"

They stood facing each other in the broad pathway. She had thrown back her veil, and in the clear moonlight her face looked fairer and purer than ever. But she blushed under his long look and began to walk on faster than before.

"Can we not be real friends?" she said, impulsively. "I mean friends without any silliness or sentiment."

"You mean platonic——" he began, but she cut him short, shaking her head impatiently.

"No, no! The word platonic always suggests spinsters of fifty, ladylike curates, or something stolid and German. But now and then I find myself wishing I had a real man friend, to whom I could go for advice, and who would give it me, forgetting that I was a girl at all."

"You wouldn't like it a bit, Miss Knight," he said, decisively. "No woman respects a man for being indifferent to her. And your proposed friend would certainly have to be an octogenarian and blind to adopt such an attitude toward you."

"Friendship, real friendship, I mean, between a young man and a young woman is, in your opinion then, impossible?" she said, curling her mouth disdainfully.

"When the woman is you, and the man loves her—yes."

He spoke very low, but she heard him perfectly. She caught her breath for a moment. She was in part surprised, in part annoyed, and yet secretly a little pleased. He was so big and protective looking, and went so straight to the point, this last quality being the surest to excite a woman's approbation in a wooer. With all her demureness, coquetry was latent within her, for she looked up quite simply and said in unmoved tones:

"I am sorry we can't be friends, Mr. Read. I think I will take the omnibus here."

"The two-penny limit is not reached until Sloane street," he observed, in accents as sedulously restrained as her own. "It would be very unfair to me, Miss Knight, to leave me at this juncture. It would be indeed telling me that I had seriously offended you; and I would not do that for the world."

They walked on a little while in silence. Then she exclaimed energetically:

"I hate this lovmaking element, which will come in and spoil everything."

"It is the one thing which idealizes life and makes it worth living. And you will find it out some day."

"Why should you suppose so? Women can get on without men a great deal better than men imagine. I think the silliest line in all poetry is Byron's, about love being a woman's whole existence. It may have meant something in his time, when girls did nothing but play the harp, make wax flowers, and pose in ringlets for Books of Beauty; but at this end of the nineteenth century, hundreds of English women have to be breadwinners, and have no time to press dead flowers and weep over love letters tied up with blue ribbon."

"Breadwinning doesn't prevent men from falling in love," he retorted. "Why, then, should it crush all tender feeling out of women? Believe me, Miss Knight, only a woman can make a man happy, and only a man can make a woman happy."

"I am happy," she exclaimed, indignantly turning on him her shining gray eyes. "At least," she faltered as she met his gaze, "I—I am very busy and quite contented. The two-penny limit is reached. Here is Sloane street. Thank you, and good-by."

"Good-by," he said, holding, for the first time, her

slim, strong hand in his. "But we shall meet on Monday at the Museum, shall we not?"

"Who knows what a day may bring forth?" she returned enigmatically, and sprang into her omnibus, little guessing the deep significance which after events would attach to her light words of farewell.

CHAPTER III.

THE OTHER MAN.

Monday's post brought to Aylmer a letter from the provincial photographer who had taken the portrait of Miss Phyllis Knight. The man inclosed a copy of the picture, the number of which Aylmer had forwarded, and offered to send on several others of the lady "in stage costume."

"Miss Phyllis Knight's appearance was so extremely prepossessing," the photographer declared, "that I asked permission to take her in several attitudes when she first passed through this town with the 'Settled for Life' company about a year ago. I shall be all the more ready to send you specimens to choose from, as I have a great many copies on my hands, printed by order of the gentleman to whom Miss Knight was united in marriage during the course of her last visit."

Aylmer put down the letter at this point. He had read enough.

"What a fool—what a miserable fool I have been," he exclaimed, rising and going to the window, out of which he stared blankly at the houses on the opposite side of the street. "Just because she didn't wear a wedding ring I never supposed that she was married, and even now," he added, thoughtfully, "I can't believe it."

He was striving to recall her every look and gesture. He could not, and would not, readily believe that she could be another man's wife. And yet here before him lay the photographer's letter and the portrait, upon which her name was printed.

With a feeling that his castle in the air had fallen in ruins about his head, he again took up the photographer's letter.

"No doubt newly married people indulge at first in extravagances which they afterward repent," the man continued, "and so Miss Knight's husband, I daresay, forgot the cost when he ordered six dozen of her photographs in different positions. That was more than six months ago, and when I sent the copies to the address which he furnished me, they were returned, marked 'name unknown.' This, sir, has been a serious loss to me, and in case you should meet Miss Phyllis Knight, or her husband, Mr. Sergius Trevelyan, I should be deeply indebted to you if you would remind them of their order, as I am not in a position to stand the serious loss of time and money involved in the affair."

Aylmer Read's breakfast was brought to him at this juncture by the elderly woman who "did for" the single gentlemen in the Hereford street Chambers. This particular single gentleman astonished her by immediately clapping his hat on his head and marching out of the house. A "facer" such as this must be confronted in the open air, free from the all-pervading smell of the perpetual bacon and eggs which adorned his bachelor breakfast table.

Outside he made his way mechanically to the Embankment, and watched the gray, barge-laden tide as he told himself again what a fool he had been.

A married actress!

He had waited until seven-and-twenty to find his ideal in Phyllis Knight, who was ashamed to wear her wedding ring, and whose husband, with the fanciful, theatrical-sounding name, neglected to pay for goods he had ordered!

But Aylmer's disloyalty was short-lived. It was not

the fault of his fair-haired ideal if her husband was unworthy of her, as he somewhat hastily decided that Mr. Sergius Trevelyan must be. He felt certain that such a woman would never discontinue to wear her wedding ring without good cause. Perhaps her husband had already deserted her; if not, how was he so remiss as to permit her to walk home through West End streets unattended? She was very poor and very hard-worked. Why did he let her strain every nerve, rising early and working late, when he should be supporting her in that comfort and elegance to which she had been accustomed?

Aylmer's heart burned with pity for her and with indignation against her husband, as he recalled the thinness of her beautiful face and the tired shadows under her eyes. His heart ached for his own disappointment, but he felt desperately anxious to help her in her troubles. In his position as journalist, constantly meeting with other men in the same profession, it occurred to him that he might be the means of putting work in her way. There was no effort he would hesitate from making in his longing to be of use to her and to prove to her the possibility of a disinterested friendship, which he had owned to be impossible so long as he had believed her to be free. She had often wished for a real man friend, Had she not said so? And the extreme difficulty and delicacy of the position of friend to a young, lovely and neglected married woman did not for the moment occur to him.

He hied himself at once to the Museum. Her cold manner, her attitude of reserved self-defense were at once explained by her unhappy married experiences. It was not as if she had in any way encouraged his attentions or endeavored to pass herself off as an unmarried woman. Had she loved her husband, Aylmer argued, she would assuredly have worn her wedding ring openly before the world. She was not even in mourning; he could not hug

the hope that blue serge represented the costume of a widow for a man who had been alive a little more than six months ago. It was an intensely painful and disagreeable thought to remember that she had been married at all, and seemed to prove that he had greatly overrated his powers of perception when he believed that he had read in her face not only childlike innocence, but an unconsciousness of the very passion of love.

The knowledge of her profession was also an ugly revelation. Aylmer was too sensible to connect her calling with any reproach or slur upon her character, but he greatly disliked the thought that her mingled demureness and impulsiveness were the result of a dramatic training and not the natural expression of her feelings. At the same time, the fascination that she exercised over him was so strong that even now, when all hope of winning her seemed to be utterly swept away, he felt that life would be impossible without, at least, her friendship, and that no woman would ever succeed in wholly effacing her image from his mind.

Ten o'clock found him in the Museum sculpture galleries, but no opportunity for exercising his capability for disinterested friendship was offered him. The girl in blue serge came not that day, or the next, or yet the next again. Days grew into weeks, and Aylmer left off haunting the galleries, contenting himself with occasional surprise visits, in the hope that she might have returned. He searched the Museum attendance book, and even made inquiries of the curators, but all to no effect. Miss Knight had not come back, and the British Museum knew her no more.

All that Aylmer could be sure of was that a Miss Phyllis Knight or Mrs. Sergius Trevelyan lived or had lived somewhere within a two-penny omnibus drive from Sloane street, presumably, therefore, in the Hammer-

smith or West Kensington districts; that she was bewilderingly beautiful and extremely fascinating, very poor, very reserved, and that she earned her living by acting in small theatrical touring companies and by executing sketches and designs. Had she been single, he would most certainly have followed up such slight clues as were in his possession. But of what use to track down a married woman, and one, too, whom he could not see without emotion? Rather ought he to rejoice that such a disturbing element had been removed from his life, and to take up its monotonous threads with a feeling of relief at trouble and turmoil escaped.

And yet, however he might philosophise, Aylmer knew that in his secret heart he cherished the conviction that fate would throw them together again, and that some day he should be called upon to answer the appeal for help in her luminous gray eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

After Miss Knight parted from Aylmer Read on that eventful Saturday night and entered a Hammersmith omnibus, she waited until her cavalier was out of hearing before giving the direction "Severn Road."

Her mouth curved into a half smile of approbation as she peeped discreetly from the door and saw her erstwhile companion standing on the curb in the moonlight, raising his hat from his curly fair hair in a parting salutation.

"Delightfully big he looks," was her mental comment. "I expect living all these years in the country has made him so nice and chivalrous. His face is not exactly handsome, but his figure makes up for it. I like that yellow mustache; but it's almost a pity his eyes are so dark. One can see the emotions in light eyes. Brown are merely like so many brandy-balls."

From which criticisms it may be inferred that in spite of her classic profile and the mingled adoration and reverence she had inspired in Aylmer Read, Miss Knight was still to some extent youthful and frivolous in her ideas.

She leaned back in her seat, a little tired, but in a pleased and happy humor, until, the Albert Hall, Kensington Church, Holland Park and Addison Road having been successfully passed, the omnibus drew up at her destination.

Severn Road was an extremely uninviting thoroughfare, given over to advertisement-covered hoarding and half-finished blocks of staring red brick residential flats; a

considerable space of uneven waste ground intervened between these erections, speculative builders having begun them on a large scale and come to grief before their completion, and two large and ugly blocks of board schools likewise disfigured the locality. Here, hidden behind an open space inclosed by a tall wooden fence, given up to huge, colored posters advocating popular medicines and plays, two blocks of unpretending one-storied, semi-detached houses, bordered by gardens back and front, and facing a row of smaller and meaner dwelling places, stood in a "left behind by the tide" fashion, awaiting the inevitable moment when they should be swept away by some enterprising builder, and the site devoted to other massive red brick mansions of the most approved modern style.

"Lockhart Cottages" was the name painted on the wall of that particular one of these little old houses which was nearest to the high-road, from which, however, they were completely concealed. As if to emphasize their unsuitability among these recent palatial surroundings, the absurd little houses stood a long way back from the Severn Road, and their front garden gates opened only on a rough piece of ground leading to a mews, and rendered intolerably noisy out of lesson hours by the shouts of the children from the schools adjoining.

But the way was quiet enough at midnight as Miss Knight hurried by the towering blocks of flats and the waste ground and the hoardings until she reached the most distant of the four semi-detached cottages, divided by a high brick wall from the Board Schools, and shut in as carefully both at the back and at the front, with walls edged with broken glass bottles, as though the house within was of great value and importance, instead of being a modest relic of the past, at a rental of £26 a year.

Through a space of lattice work at the top of the door in the garden wall Miss Knight could see a light shining

through the red curtains of the sitting-room window. Those Turkey-red curtains were an idea of hers, to give a homelike warmth and color to the little house when the lamps were lit at night, for Lockhart Cottages had ever been innocent of gas. Miss Knight lifted the latch and entered a small, well-kept garden, in which young ash trees and ivy fought for all sustenance from the ground, and made life a hard struggle for the geraniums, pansies, daisies and forget-me-nots in the tiny flower beds. After carefully drawing the bolt in the gate, Miss Knight slipped her latch-key as noiselessly as possible into the dark-green door of the house. Evidently she was anxious not to disturb someone, for she fastened the door with the same care and quiet, and passed softly into a little front sitting room, where, upon a round table by the window, her supper was waiting for her on a snow-white cloth. Bread and butter, watercress, cheese and filtered water formed the simple fare provided; but Miss Knight had a healthy girl's appetite, and ate her supper thankfully, while she read through a daily newspaper in the first spare half hour of a busy day.

A cottage piano stood in one corner of the room, of which the furniture was cheap and simple in the extreme, but not without traces of refined and cultivated tastes of its inmates. Book-shelves of plain deal, neatly bordered by leather and brass nails, abounded, closely packed with well-worn volumes in English, French and German; poems, novels, educational works, paper-covered plays and several books of reference on art. On a small side table a paint box and sketching block suggested the nature of Miss Knight's home employment, as did the hand-painted flower panels which beautified the door, and some spirited black-and-white drawings hanging on the walls.

The young artist seemed by no means anxious to retire

to rest, in spite of the lateness of the hour. After finishing her supper, she removed the cloth and plates to the kitchen, at the back of the house, and, returning to the sitting-room, put pen, ink and paper on the table and sat down to write.

Before doing so, however, she slowly drew out, one by one, the many hairpins which held in place the twists and coils of her daintily dressed hair until it tumbled in soft, brown waves, shining golden in the high lights, about her shoulders and far down below her waist. She uttered a little sigh of relief as she finished this task. She could think more freely with the weight of luxuriant tresses lowered from her brain, and she smiled in anticipation of what she was about to write as she sat twisting her hair into a loose plait to hang down her back for the night.

"My own darling," so her letter began.

"It is getting on one o'clock. Cresswell is in bed and the house is wonderfully quiet, but I must write and tell you of a little thing which happened to me to-day, as I know you will be interested and amused, and I shall have no time to-morrow. My story is about a Man. Actually. Don't be alarmed. He is really a stranger. I don't think I mentioned in my former letters a very big, splendidly-made, fair-haired male student who recently came to draw at the British Museum, and stared at me a good deal. Words altogether fail to describe the nature of his attempts at art. The white chalk objects in three-cornered hats with which the Board School children decorate our garden wall show infinitely more artistic power than this big young man possesses. Until I looked at his alleged copy of the 'Clytie' I did not believe that any sane person could draw so badly. But perhaps you will say before I come to the end of my story that this young man is not sane."

At the point the writer paused and looked up quickly, listening intently.

Of course it must only be fancy, she told herself. And yet it seemed as though her own name, uttered in faint, wailing accents, hung upon the night air.

The sound died away. Miss Knight decided that she was tired and nervous, and that her imagination was playing her tricks as she settled herself to her letter again.

"I told you in my last that I had some work promised me on the Morning Illustrated on the strength of some pen-and-ink drawings of street scenes I took up to the office. They suggested that I should send in some sketches of the costumes worn in 'The Hermit' the new play at the Grassmarket Theatre, produced to-night. Well, I did the work, and it was very interesting. I will tell you all about it in another letter. But, as I know you are always more interested in anything approaching a romance than in serious subjects, I will get on to what happened when I left the theatre after the third act, as the principal characters did not change their dresses in the fourth. Close to the entrance some horrid, tipsy young men tried to prevent me from passing. I had my old serge gown on and a thick, black veil, but I suppose my portfolio showed these polished gentlemen that I was a working girl; and in any case ladies of education and refinement are not expected to be abroad at night in our highly civilized capital without being insulted. But quite suddenly, as I was growing desperately frightened and mad, a guardian angel in evening dress and a light overcoat swooped down, dismissed my persecutors with a wave of his magic walking-stick, and lo! I was marching along Piccadilly, arm-in-arm with a gentleman who addressed me by name, but whom I had never before spoken to—none other than my big fellow-student at the Museum."

Miss Knight was warming to her work. Her pen flew over her paper as she bent over her letter, a smile of amusement hovering about the corners of her mouth, the lamplight falling obliquely under a green shade upon her glossy hair. Lockhart Cottages after midnight were wonderfully quiet, save for nomads of the feline race and the faint rumble of passing vehicles in the main road. The charwoman, the lady who mangled at home, the shoemaker and the chimney sweep inhabiting the mean little terrace opposite were all sleeping off the libations which marked Saturday pay-day. And yet the girl in blue serge, sitting up to write her letter, could not rid herself of the conviction that somewhere near to her some one was feebly calling on her name.

Rising suddenly, she went to the hall door and listened. She did not dare to open it, having a great fear of burglars, although there was little indeed in the house worth stealing. Hearing nothing, she crept upstairs and listened outside Cresswell's door to the heavy, regular breathing of the old servant within. Then, reassured by the consciousness of some one within call, she opened the back door and looked out into the garden.

Through the broad leaves of the chestnuts she stared up at the moon sailing in a silver sea of cloud; it was a night for tenderness, for lovers' meetings and faltering love-vows; but this girl with the changing hazel-gray eyes, supple form and shining hair, dared think of none of these things as she gazed into the peaceful sky above her. Yet a sense of something wanting in her life made her heave a little sigh as she closed and fastened the door before returning to her letter.

"I couldn't very well send him away," she wrote on, "for he was very kind, and a gentleman. I should like him for a friend, but I suppose that isn't possible, for on

the way home he actually told me that he loved me. Of course I was very angry with him."

Miss Knight put down her pen at this point.

"That isn't true," she said to herself, reflectively, as she reread her last statement. "I was not in the least angry with Mr. Read."

Leaning her elbow on the table, she rested her cheek on her hand, and began to think about him. In spite of her nickname of "Diana the Disdainful," it is to be feared that Miss Knight was by no means so adamant where the other sex was concerned as she appeared. Over her fair face one very becoming blush followed another as she recalled the look in Aylmer's eyes when they met her own, and the sound of his voice as he spoke of his love."

Of course it was a mere fancy on his part, this love at first sight, she told herself. Mr. Read was doubtless an impressionable young man and would speedily forget all about his sudden infatuation.

"Meantime I have to face him on Monday," she reflected, not as though she disliked the idea. "I wonder how it will end?"

Her letter lay before her unfinished. She was tired and sleepy, and almost inclined to conclude it in the morning, when a sound, unmistakable this time, struck upon her ears in the night silence.

"For heaven's sake let me in!"

Hoarse, broken though the voice was, she knew the accents well. With a blanched face she sprang to her feet, slipped the chain and bolts of the front door, and flew to the garden gate. Turning the key with shaking fingers, she stretched out her arms, peering into the darkness with eyes accustomed to the light.

"My darling! Where are you?"

"Here, here!"

By the gate, wrapped in a long cloak, bowed and bro-

ken, there cowered a trembling figure which seemed to shrink from the touch of her encircling arms. With a terrible stab of pain and apprehension at her heart, Miss Knight raised the crouching form, and, with the words of welcome frozen upon her lips, pushed open the door of their home.

CHAPTER V.

A STORY OF LONDON.

"Dorothy!"

"Phyllis!"

The sisters were seated together on the sofa, clasped in each other's arms, the younger shaken by a convulsive outburst of weeping, the elder striving to soothe her and to keep back her own tears.

It was eight months since they had parted; yet in that comparatively short space of time a terrible change for the worse had taken place in Phyllis Knight's appearance.

So greatly, indeed, had she altered that the likeness between the sisters, normally so great as to be bewildering, seemed almost lost in the contrast between the clear, pink pallor of the young artist and the ashen-gray of her sister's face. In spite of the warmth of the summer night, Phyllis' hands were cold; Dorothy slipped on her knees before her, and tried to warm them with her lips.

"My poor child! My poor darling! You have been ill, terribly ill, I can see; and you did not tell me! How could you keep it from me?"

"It isn't that, Dorothy," her sister whispered. "It is my heart"—she pressed her thin hands against her breast as she spoke—"my heart is broken."

Her gray eyes were distended with despair. Incessant weeping had destroyed all control of her features, and her mouth quivered pitifully even while she was not speaking.

"Oh, Dolly! Dolly!" she moaned, stretching out her arms, not round her sister, but in the empty air above her. "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

She was a little taller than Dorothy and less regularly beautiful. Her pretty mouth, now all blurred with weeping, was far smaller than her sister's, and the look of appealing femininity, which now and then softened Miss Knight's pure loveliness, was far more strongly emphasized in Phyllis, her junior by one year. In complexion Phyllis was less fair, and her hair, by nature brown, had been dyed to a pale gold color, at variance with her dark eyebrows and eyelashes. Her dress was of black alpaca, ill-fitting and shabby in the extreme, and the cloak she was wearing was of the commonest black material, and wholly inappropriate for a day in June.

Dorothy's eyes noted these details with acute anxiety. As Phyllis stretched her arms above her head she caught sight of a thin line of gold on the third finger of her left hand.

"You are married!"

Something of reproach, but something of relief also, rang through Miss Knight's tones. Nothing short of a tragic catastrophe could have transformed dimpled, coquettish, laughing Phyllis into this worn and despairing woman. But there are sorrows and sorrows. If only it should prove that Phyllis had a bad husband, or that he was dead, it would be terrible, but——

"That wedding ring means nothing," whispered Phyllis, faintly. "Don't look at me like that, Dorothy. Only listen first before you judge me. Let me tell you everything from the beginning before my mind begins to wander, as it so often does now. And don't go away from me. Sit here by me and hold me to you. Oh, Dolly! Dolly! Why did I ever leave you?"

Dorothy wrapped her arms about her sister, and pillowed her cheek upon her heart. Her pharisaical instinct had been but momentary; she was an intensely proud girl, to whom honor was far dearer than life, but she loved her

sister more dearly than any living thing. Phyllis had the weaker, gentler nature of the two; sisterly love, ambition and art had never proved enough for her; vain, trustful, emotional and innocent, it would seem that nature had marked her out as the victim of a man's treachery and her own folly.

"Oh, it is so good to be with you again," she murmured. "If I could only die now, this moment, as I soon shall do! Dolly, if it was wrong of me to deceive you, you can't think how I have been punished. To-night, do you know, I have walked all the way from Richmond here. I have worn out my boots, and my feet are so sore. I shall limp for days. I had to come at night lest people should laugh at me; I looked so silly in these clothes. They are my landlady's. She let me have them because I gave her all my own pretty things for rent. And, after all, it doesn't matter how I look now, Dolly. For I am deserted and cast-off, and dying, dear, dying. Thank goodness for that!"

Tears rolled down from Dorothy's eyes over her sister's thin face. Phyllis stretched up her hand and stroked the other's cheek.

"I knew you would be sorry," she murmured; "and when I felt as I crawled along, all through Kew, Chiswick and Hammersmith to-night, that my feet could not carry me farther, I told myself, 'Dolly will be sorry.' No one has been sorry for me yet. They seem to think it was all my own fault. But you will listen to me and you will understand."

"I will try, dear. But you are not strong enough to talk. Come to bed now and tell me all in the morning."

"No, no! You must hear everything," Phyllis exclaimed excitedly. "I couldn't sleep without telling you. I have deceived you all the time. You know I pretended that I should be playing at Christmas time? That was

not true. We had a fortnight's vacation, and I spent at the Hotel Metropole, at Brighton, what I thought was my honeymoon."

"What you thought?"

"Yes, yes! I am going to tell you everything from the beginning. But before you can forgive me, try to understand the awful dullness of a theatrical tour with a successful London piece. People think that stage life is so amusing; of course I thought it would be when I would become an actress two years ago, in spite of all your prayers. I expected excitement, fun, love-making, flirtations, splendid offers of marriage, brilliant successes and heaps of money, my portraits in all the shop windows, and an earl at my feet. What a fool I was! I can't tell you how dull, how dreary, this touring life has been. Of course, I wouldn't own it to you in my letters, because you would have wanted me to leave the stage, and I still hoped to be another Neilsón. You saw the 'Settled for Life' company at the railway station last September. You yourself thought the men looked common and odd, with their blue chins and green overcoats and schoolboy noisiness. You yourself would have said that he—Mr. Trevelyan, I mean—looked very different from the others if you had seen him."

"Sergius Trevelyan," exclaimed Miss Knight. "That was the name of the man who played a small part, and was to join the company at Liverpool, wasn't it?"

"Yes. There were four married couples, and an old woman who got tipsy sometimes, and Mr. Trevelyan and I. I tried to lodge with the old woman, but she got angry with me because I would not spend money on spirits for her. Nobody liked me. The women said I gave myself airs and called me 'Miss Innocent,' because I would not laugh at the disgusting stories they told each other in the dressing rooms and in the train. That trav-

eling on Sunday is dreadful. The men smoke and play cards, and excite attention, and contempt, too, I think, at the railway stations by making themselves conspicuous and talking very loudly. And except when they are telling coarse stories, the only things they all talk about are the lodgings they are going to have at the next town and the lodging they had at the last, and what the cooking was like, and how much they had to pay. Sometimes, too, they talk about the extraordinary hits they each and all of them have made in different parts, and how dreadfully the stage is going down. But in general it is lodgings, lodgings all the time. Because I had been acting only two years they all looked down upon me, as though that fact were something to be ashamed of, and called me every day 'novice' and 'amateur.' I am dwelling on all these things, Dolly, because I never would own to you before that the life was anything but delightful, and because, too, I almost wanted to put off the dreadful part of my story as long as possible."

She paused. A faint flush had come into her cheeks, but her lips were still colorless. Dorothy looked at her with ever growing apprehension.

"If only you would try and eat something," she whispered, coaxingly, "you would feel stronger to tell me everything. My poor child, you look half starved!"

"I haven't cared to eat for several days now," Phyllis returned, shaking her head wearily. "I have only just taken enough to keep me alive to come to you. I want you to put yourself right in my place, remembering that I am not clever like you, and that I cannot live without some one to love me."

"Don't I love you, Phyllis?"

"Indeed, indeed, you do. But I wanted another kind of love, too. It was not that I wanted to be married yet, but I wanted a little kindness, a little admiration, a little

petting—I was so lonely, so wretchedly lonely, in those ugly, black, northerly towns. What could I do with myself all day in lodgings at ten shillings a week? The men of the company, all but Mr. Trevelyan, seemed to pass their time in going about in bands from one hotel bar to another. The married women made friends with their landladies, or called upon each other to talk about their lodgings, and their parts, and scandal—about me, I suppose, as I was the only young woman in the company. But none of them came to see me, and you know, Dorothy, I cannot bear to go about by myself. In some of the rougher towns the people are almost ready to stone anybody who is in the least well dressed. There is nothing to see, nowhere to go, no one to speak to, nothing to do but sit on horsehair chairs in mean lodgings, staring at the cheap vases and wax flowers on the mantelpiece. Oh, Dolly, it isn't as if I had had art to comfort me. What art and what hope of getting on is there in going down every night before seven to a dirty, draughty theatre and painting one's face and changing one's dress just to go on and say, 'Yes, papa,' and 'Here is Frank,' and 'Good gracious!' and 'Quite well, thank you,' at intervals, three hours every night for days and weeks and months together? And then the coming home—that is the worst part of it! The rush home, frightened by the coarse remarks of shop boys hanging about the stage door. Home! What a word to use! A cloth laid, and a familiar, prying landlady, or else the cloth without the landlady. I know these details sound trivial and silly, but they mean so much in the end. Think how much in a life of that kind tenderness and sympathy and laughter and fun and brightness, and the companionship of some one who understands you, some one of education and in your own rank of life, with something else to talk about besides lodging and parts would

mean! To be taken to and from the theatre, to know when one came out, tired and hot, into the night air, some one would be waiting to wrap a shawl round one's shoulders, draw one's arm through his and take one home! Or, on clear moonlight nights, away from the ugly theatre and the ugly town, with its chimneys and its factories, to the open country, sometimes, best of all, to the sea! The change from the flare of the gas lights, the dust, the paint, the sneers and stories of the women, to the cool, pure moonlight shining on the waves as they break in upon the shore.

"Can't you fancy what all this would mean? Some one talking poetry, literature, prettily turning compliments, or bright nonsense, some one to buy you fresh flowers daily, and books and bonbons, some one with whom to take long country rambles, talking about all the things one likes best, and, most of all, dear, of you. Yes, you must not shake your head like that. I know it has all been a miserable, ghastly failure, but he has never tired of hearing and asking questions about you. He made me angry by stealing a portrait of you from my album and refusing to give it back, and he would sit constantly staring at your picture in my rooms without speaking, until I kept it hidden away from jealousy.

"You see, I fell in love with him; but, Dolly, wasn't it natural? He was always so gentle and so kind. He could not make companions of the men in the company, he said. He had a contempt for actors, which I was ready to share. He did not act very well himself, indeed, he did not seem to try to; but he was so handsome that at every town the stupid girls, factory hands and all sorts of women, used to send him the most wonderful ill-spelt love-letters and watch for him to come out of the stage door. It was a petty triumph, perhaps, to find that he had eyes for no one but me. He seemed not to

remember that there was another woman living but myself, yet all the women in the company liked and admired him, while the men detested him. They used to call him Cupid, which made me very angry, though I hardly knew why. He had great blue eyes, with curled-up dark lashes, beautiful features, a black mustache; and short, curly black hair. His figure was tall and graceful, and he moved and dressed so well that he made the other men look clumsy.

"Of course, all the company began to chatter when Mr. Trevelyan and I were constantly together. Sergius told me not to mind; he said their coarse minds could not understand a friendship of souls such as ours, and I agreed with him. Long before he ever told me he loved me, he would sit by my side reading aloud to me, in a beautiful voice which thrilled with feeling passages from Tennyson and Mrs. Browning, and Matthew Arnold and Shelley. He considered Robert Browning coarse, and Swinburne animal, he said. I never met any man who seemed to have such tender, delicate susceptibilities.

"One of the married women had to leave to go home to nurse her child, and in her place a girl was engaged who speedily gave the whole company something to talk about. She was very pretty, I suppose; at least, all the men thought her so, and she flirted with them all under the eyes of their wives, and laughed at them, and used bad language when she got excited. But she used to have champagne in the dressing-room and offer it to the others, and all the women, although they pretended to be shocked, liked her very much better than they did me.

"Miss Montgomery, for that is what she called herself, fell in love, or pretended to fall in love, with Mr. Trevelyan. He did not seem to take any notice of her, but I got dreadfully unhappy and jealous, so jealous and

so afraid of losing him that one miserable rainy day last winter, as I sat shivering over a smoking fire in a red brick cottage in Oldham, Sergius found me in just the mood he had been hoping and waiting for.

"I did not hear him come in. He opened the front door himself and slipped in so quietly into my sitting room that I did not know he was there. I had my head lowered in my hands, and I was crying. Suddenly I felt his kisses upon the back of my neck, and the next moment he was kneeling beside me, clasping me in his arms and calling me his queen, his pure, white dove. I did not repulse him—how could I, Dolly, when I was so lonely and miserable, and when I loved him? You can't understand now; but some day you will know how a woman feels when she really loves a man and has his arms around her for the first time. It means perfect happiness and perfect rest—there is nothing like it in the whole world."

She ceased speaking. Tears rolled fast down her pretty, worn face. Dorothy's mouth was firmly set, and in her eyes there shone already a light of fierce indignation.

"Go on, my dear," she said presently. It made her impatient that Phyllis' memory should even now linger too regretfully over her lost happiness, and she wanted fuller justification for the feelings of burning resentment which already smouldered in her heart against Sergius Trevelyan.

Phyllis, awakening from her brief dream, wiped her eyes, sighed, and obeyed.

"I never tried to disguise from Sergius that I loved him. He spent all the time with me until we went down to the theatre, and it was on our way there that, for the first time, he said something which hurt and startled me.

"It was about you. Of course, I wanted to write and tell you that Sergius and I were engaged, for, although he had not said in so many words, Will you marry me? he had declared he could no longer live without me, and I thought that was the same thing.

"As we reached the stage door, I turned to him.

"I must write to Dorothy to-night,' I said, 'and tell her. I have said very little about you in my letters as yet, but I will make up for that to-night.'

"I could see his face change.

"Don't write until we have another talk,' he said, and that night when he saw me home he begged to be allowed to come in, and, as he said, explain things, and grew vexed and reproachful because I said it was too late for visitors, and insisted on parting from him at the door.

"I was happy that night, thinking of Sergius and his love, but I could not bear the idea of keeping anything from you. At one moment I thrilled all over with a warm delight as I recalled his tender caresses and passionate words, and the next my heart grew chilled with uneasiness as I remembered his admonition against writing to you until he had explained. Explained! What was there, what could there be to explain? Even if he was badly off and not in a position to marry yet, I would gladly wait for him. There seemed to be a discrepancy between the impetuosity of his love avowal and his wish to 'explain things' before I wrote to you.

"Next day he came early, before, indeed, I had had my breakfast. If anything, he was more impassioned than ever. He covered my hands and face with kisses and swore that I was his ideal—the woman he had all his life waited for—and should be his guardian angel. I was so glad to find he had forgiven my refusal to admit him on the preceding evening that at first I almost forgot

what I had to ask. At last, in the middle of his vows and protestations, I said :

“‘Why may I not tell my sister that you love me and that we are engaged?’

“His arm was round my waist, but as I spoke he withdrew it and sighed deeply. Then he got up and walked away from me.

“‘I thought you so different from other women,’ he murmured, half to himself. ‘The tie that binds us is that of soul to soul. We want no conventional engagement, no vulgar remarks and congratulations. Simply to know that you are mine and that I am yours—that would be enough for me.’

“Of course, he made me feel small and conventional and ashamed of myself; but something within me told me I was right, especially as he immediately began to walk about the room and inveigh, not only against engagements, but against the marriage tie, declaring it to be an effete and vulgar institution, suitable only for bourgeois minds, to whom true love and the communion of spirit with spirit was unknown.

“I felt the ground slipping away from me; but I thought of you, Dorothy, and what you would have said, and that gave me courage.

“‘I am sorry, Mr. Trevelyan,’ I said; ‘very, very sorry. But if I had known that those were your opinions, I should never have let my heart go out to you as it did yesterday.’

“He stopped in his walk and stared at me, half sorrowfully, half scornfully.

“‘Have I been so mistaken in you then?’ he asked. ‘And in your case, also, is marriage and not love the absorbing idea of your mind?’

“I grew hot and miserable under the implied sneer, but I told him that love and friendship were in my opin-

ion different, and that I would not willingly give the former to a man who did not love me well enough to make me his wife. Then I said that we had both been mistaken, and that for my part, I should behave to him in future as if yesterday's interview had never taken place. Only I would rather see as little of him as possible for the rest of the tour.

"I was leaving the room as I finished speaking, very miserable and humiliated, and dreadfully excited, although my voice sounded quiet enough, when he flung himself between me and the door, and, going down on his knees at my feet, swore that he had only talked in that way to try me and see what my affection was made of. He was a strict Roman Catholic, he declared, and it was against his most cherished convictions to marry a heretic; and, besides that, his mother and father, who were people in a magnificent position, had chosen a beautiful heiress for him to marry, and would disinherit him if he disobeyed them.

" 'The more reason,' I cried, trying to wrench my hands from his clasp, 'for parting at once. I certainly will not stand in the way of your fortune and your career.'

" 'I love you better than fortune, career, or life itself!' he exclaimed, covering my hands and the folds of my dress with kisses. 'I will sacrifice everything for you, since you insist upon it. But if I do this, you must promise me faithfully to keep our engagement a solemn secret until such time as I can prepare my parents' minds for the news. No one must know; it must be a precious secret between us; I will not have it shared by your sister.'

"In the end he wrung from me a reluctant consent to this arrangement. I know you will say it was very wrong and silly of me, but you must remember that I

had no one to advise me, that I loved him very dearly, and that he is quite extraordinarily eloquent and persuasive, and has a voice which can make one do anything.

"From that moment he spent all his time with me. When I came down to breakfast in the morning I used to find him there, and he never left me until he had seen me home from the theatre every night. He seemed reluctant to let me go out of his sight, and constantly reproached me for not allowing him to come in to supper with me, as he declared he spent the greater part of each night walking up and down outside my lodgings. As we only stayed a week in each town, he complained bitterly that our marriage would be impossible until the tour broke up for a fortnight's vacation at Christmas before going on for another twenty weeks in the new year. At last, quite unexpectedly, through some disappointment about a date for a theatre, Sergius learned from the manager that we were going to play for two weeks in Sheffield, instead of a week, as was at first intended, so that he would have time to give the fortnight's notice of residence necessary for the marriage license.

"But here came another difficulty which well nigh upset his plans. The marriage, so Sergius told me, must be kept a profound secret, not only from my relations and his own, but also from all the members of the 'Settled for Life' company.

"At first I thought he must be jesting, the request seemed so preposterous; but when I realized that he was thoroughly in earnest, I became very angry, and refused to take him on such terms. We had a stormy scene; he accused me of breaking his heart and ruining his career with my puritanical folly and selfishness. I had sent him mad by my coquetry, and he swore that whatever crime he might commit would lie at my door.

"That evening he did not appear at the theatre, but a messenger came in haste to inform the manager that Mr. Trevelyan was lying at his lodgings dangerously wounded by a pistol shot in the head. Every one looked at me, the men with interest, the women with open hostility. I felt sick with anxiety and self-reproach, yet how could I have acted differently?

"That night I called at his lodgings; he was delirious, the landlady assured me, and calling constantly on my name. She begged me to see him. In her presence I did so. Sergius was deadly pale, and his head was covered with a blood-stained bandage. It was only a flesh wound, as I afterward ascertained, but at the time I thought he was dying, and wept bitterly, as did the landlady. He had meant to kill himself, he told me, being unable to endure the thought of life without me, and he should certainly die that night unless I solemnly promised I would marry him when we arrived at Sheffield in ten days' time.

"Even then, when I believed his life hung in the balance, I entreated him to let me confide in you. But he would not hear to it, and became so terribly excited that the landlady upbraided me for my cruelty in being hard on a dying man. The woman knew quite well what I did not know, that he was not dying at all, or even seriously injured; but Sergius easily acquired the sympathy and affection of all women who personally attended upon him.

"Before I left the house I had consented to become his wife on his own terms, and on the last day of our stay in Sheffield we were married very quietly early in the morning at a church in the town, the only witnesses being the clerk and a pew-opener.

"At first Sergius appeared absolutely happy and contented. He loaded me with caresses, showed an inex-

plicable and morbid jealousy if I so much as mentioned another man's name, and hardly left my side. We spent the vacation together at Brighton, as I told you, going about as Mr. and Mrs. Trevelyan, although he told me it was not his real name. By descent he came, he declared, from the ancient Italian nobility on his mother's side, and the kings of Ireland on his father's side. Yet he preserved a singular and, as it seemed, unnecessary mystery on the subject of his name and his former life, and very soon began to make me jealous and unhappy by alluding darkly to many women who had loved him, and whose photographs and letters he had preserved.

"Brighton was delightful, but our return to the company, for many reasons unpleasant and painful. Naturally, I was obliged to mention my marriage to the actresses, as Sergius and I took lodgings in the same house. I knew they all disliked me, but I was hardly prepared for the dead silence in which they received the announcement, or for the sneering whispers, intentionally audible to me, which immediately followed. It is true that I did not like them, but still they were women, and women are usually interested in a marriage. My heart ached, and a lump came into my throat at their behavior, which they followed up by a studied, scornful coldness and constant allusions to 'the quiet ones being always the worse,' which were at the time incomprehensible to me.

"Gradually, as I could not fail to see, Sergius' first ardor cooled. Letters in a woman's handwriting, which he read and reread in my presence, came for him daily. He began to leave me alone for hours, just when I was beginning to feel most keenly the necessity for sympathy and affectionate companionship. When my health gave way and I was no longer able to take long rambles with him, he seemed to think himself badly treated.

Spasmodically he was tender and effusive, but at last he assumed a pitying instead of a loving tone, and openly lamented the possibility of increased expenses. This conduct especially was very, very hard to bear. He was deeply in debt, and our united salary of four pounds ten a week scarcely met our expenses, so that I dared not leave off acting.

"Every day my heartache grew. I longed passionately for you, for the touch of your hand, the sound of your voice; but Sergius would not hear of my sending for you, and in what seemed like an excess of his former fervor, he asked me if his love were not enough for me, and declared himself bitterly jealous of my affection for you.

"At last, one night in the dressing room, just two months ago, one of the married women, who meant, I think, to be kind, asked me if I did not consider it time to stop the 'sort of thing that was going on between my husband and Lelia Montgomery.' At first I could not understand her, but as she went on talking I recalled little incidents, things that had puzzled me, and which might have opened my eyes earlier to the true state of the case. Still, I could not, I would not, believe my husband false to me.

"'Here is Lelia,' whispered my informant; 'she has been out driving with Mr. Trevelyan, and he has brought her to the theatre.'

"Dorothy, try to put yourself in my place and live through the scene that followed.

"The girl came in, showily dressed, laughing, triumphant. I dare say I was a little hysterical, for I turned to her before them all and asked her whether it was true that she had been out with my husband.

"She looked at me from head to foot, and burst into a fit of coarse laughter.

"'Out with your husband!' she repeated. 'Not me! I've been out with your young man; though, for that matter, he's as much mine as yours.'

"I thought she had been drinking and drew back.

"'You cannot be in your right senses,' I said, 'to address such language to Mr. Trevelyan's wife.'

"She laughed again, louder than before.

"'His wife!' she shouted. 'Girls, that's good, isn't it? Sergius Trevelyan's wife is in America, as you and I and all the company know quite well; that farce of being married to him is played out now. Anybody can see he is sick of it and you, too.'

"'I shrank with horror from the woman, and glanced round at the other women's faces. They were interested and inquisitive, but not one showed the least sympathy with me or desire to defend me from such a foul attack on my name.

"'You all of you know,' I said, as steadily as I could, trying to stifle a horrid fear that was gathering at my heart, 'that I was married to Mr. Trevelyan, at Sheffield, before last Christmas.'

"There was a pause, filled up with Miss Montgomery's mocking laughter. Then the woman who had first told me about her spoke in tones that were not unkindly.

"'We all know,' she said, 'that Mr. Trevelyan went through some sort of ceremony with you, because he told us so, and asked us to treat you as his wife, as you were so madly in love with him you couldn't live without him, and had some idea that even an illegal marriage was better than nothing at all.'

"'He—my husband—told you that!' I gasped.

"'Every one of ous. He said he was in for it, even if it was a bigamy case, because, although you knew quite well he was married, it was a fad of yours.'

"I was stunned by her words, but I could see by the faces of the others that she had told the truth. I tried to speak, but something seemed to snap in my heart, my limbs gave way under me, and I fell face downward on the floor."

CHAPTER VI.

A RUINED LIFE.

Phyllis ceased. Her lips were parched and dry, but a feverish excitement glittered in her eyes. Dorothy could not trust herself to speak, but gently disengaging herself from her sister, who had held one of her hands tightly while recounting her unhappy story, she fetched from a cupboard in the adjoining room a little brandy and water, which she gently forced Phyllis to drink before continuing.

The effort of so much talking had tired the girl's weak frame, but her longing to confide every detail to her sister sustained her, and she was impatient to proceed.

"I don't know how I got back to my lodgings that night," she went on; "I afterward heard that the girl Montgomery got a cab and sent me home in it, while the actress who appeared in the first-piece, and was my understudy, undertook to play my part. When I recovered consciousness I was lying on the sofa in the sitting-room. Sergius was standing by the table on which the cloth was laid for supper, helping himself to whisky.

"I tried to sit up and utter his name. I did not at first remember what had happened, but his first words brought it all back to me.

"'What in the world induced you to make a scene at the theatre to-night, and give yourself away before Miss Montgomery and the other women?' he asked, irritably.

"I sprang up from the sofa.

"'Sergius,' I cried, 'it is not true, is it? What they

told me, I mean. It is impossible. You would not be human if you were so wicked. I am your wife, am I not? And you love me? That story that you were married before is a lie, is it not?

"I had seized him by the arm; I was half mad with anxiety. To my horror he did not answer me directly, but began to stroke my hair and tell me to be a good girl and not to make a fuss about nothing.

"'You know, my dear,' he said, 'I never desired this marriage; you forced it upon me. You were breaking your heart about me, and I was so touched by your infatuation that I agreed to what was a very risky business for me.'

"I could do nothing but stare at him. He actually seemed to believe what he was saying, and spoke in an injured tone.

"'It is all your own fault, my child,' he went on, 'and due to the silly, puritanical way in which you have been brought up. Love is not a thing to be cabined and confined by a wedding-ring. If it had not been for that absurd and meaningless ceremony which you insisted upon at Sheffield, we shouldn't have been half so tired of each other as we are now.'

"I hardly noticed the words in which for the first time he told me that he was tired of me in my horror at his allusions to our marriage as a 'meaningless ceremony.' I had sunk on the sofa again. My mind was torn between a growing despair and a tendency to hysterical laughter at the sight of Sergius, who had certainly been drinking more than usual, seated at the table, preaching philosophy and resignation over his whisky and water.

"'If I am not your wife,' I said at last, 'what am I? What shall I be? What will the world think of me in a little while?'

"Sergius rolled a cigarette while he answered:

“‘Think? Oh, they’ll think you are a charming young lady who has had an experience,’ he answered, ‘and I daresay, in the Bohemian circles in which you are likely to move, it won’t stand in the way of your getting married regularly some day, which appears to be the height of your ambition. But I really wish, Phyllis, you wouldn’t use that conventional expression, “what will the world say or think of you?” My dear child, people who haven’t any money or position haven’t any “world.” These excellent stage persons, mostly recruited from the back-shop, hardly constitute what is called society. All this scene to-night was very silly. We have had our little day of love and sunshine, and when we part it must be as friends.’

“‘Dear,’ I cried at last, ‘you or I must be mad! You cannot in your sober senses be sitting there before me, telling me that you have utterly ruined me and wrecked my life for the sake of a vicious, transient fancy. Try to realize for one moment what your words would mean if they were true. I have loved you, trusted you. I have been your devoted wife, believing in your love for me; you persuaded me to marry you, forced me to keep our marriage a secret from my dear sister, because you made me believe that you were dying for love of me. You have often told me how it pains you to see any one suffering and to relieve them. Think what I am suffering now. How can I return to my sister so—the purest, sweetest woman in this world. The very thought of such a thing makes me sick with shame. When I have spoken to you of our hard, struggling lives since our father’s death, Dorothy’s and mine, you have seemed deeply touched, and have told me you would have given all you had to have worked for us, helped us, and protected us. You have been moved to tears by the account of our poverty and trials. How can you, then, even in jest, suggest the

possibility of breaking my heart, ruining my life, betraying and deserting me, in so vile and cold-blooded a manner?’

“As I stood by the table looking across at him I perceived that he had tears in his eyes as he stared into his empty glass.

“‘I was thinking,’ he said, ‘of Swinburne’s wonderful lines: “For love has no abiding, and dies before the kiss.” How true they are, and how sad that love, the sweetest thing on earth, should be so short-lived!’

“He had not even heard me.

“Dorothy, as I looked at him with new feelings in my mind, I seemed to understand him for the first time. Suffering made me clever. I began to realize the awful mistake I had made in supposing that this vicious, shallow sentimentalist was a man of heart and feeling. There was nothing to be hoped for from him, and yet I had put myself utterly in his power. Just because he was a man and I was a woman he could injure me beyond all reparation, and I could do nothing.

“Presently, while I was still watching him, Sergius’s head dropped upon the table, and he fell fast asleep.

“I must have lost my senses, I think, for I can remember hardly anything until I found myself at the railway station without my hat, crying out wildly that I wanted to get back to London to my sister that very night. My address was found on an envelope in my pocket, and I was taken back to my lodgings, where I lay dangerously ill with brain fever for six terrible weeks. Long before I recovered Sergius had left the town with the rest of the company. My illness upset his nerves, so my landlady informed me. He had left five pounds in her hands, with instructions to keep me as long as possible. When the money was gone she was to apply to him,

finding the address of the 'Settled for Life' company in the theatrical newspapers.

"As soon as my senses came back to me I resolved to find him out. At least, I must have some proof as to whether my marriage was or was not illegal, and not for my own sake alone. I was at first so strangely ill and weak that I could hardly cross the room, and constantly lost my identity; but as soon as the doctor said that I was well enough to travel, I followed the company from the midland town where I was taken ill to Richmond in Surrey, a long, hot and tiresome journey, to defray which I had to sell my trinkets, my theatrical wardrobe, and even the clothes I was wearing, taking some discarded ones of my landlady's in exchange.

"I reached Richmond in the evening, and saw the bills of the company about the town. I had only a few shillings left, and nothing that I could sell. I know quite well you will say to me: 'Why did I not apply to you?' Remember, dear, I did try to come to you that night when I first learned that dreadful story; after that, for many days, I did not even know who or where I was. I have always been such a shocking correspondent that I knew my long silence would not trouble you; and, besides, how could I write you such a hideous and shameful confession? And how could I bear to take your money when I know how hard you work, and how you have kept the home going and paid Cresswell's wages and everything? Since I married Sergius I had never sent any money home. The two pounds ten a week I earned hardly did more than pay for his cigarettes and whiskies and sodas, and the getting up of his linen, about which he was most particular, for he had in everything extravagant tastes, and wore the most beautiful and expensive clothes.

"At Richmond I dared not openly ask for Sergius.

That dreadful feeling of being disgraced and deserted before the eyes of the whole company ate into my heart when I thought of the women's unfriendly curiosity and coarse jesting. I was so shabby, too, that even for that alone I could not bear to face any one of them. So I hung around the river path outside the theatre, and watched the moonlight upon the water until I had to tear myself shuddering away. For—perhaps it was that I had not had any food for a long time, and was growing light-headed—but that silver flickering pathway seemed to draw my feet to it as a magnet.

“‘At the best,’ a voice seemed to whisper in my ear, ‘the man you loved, the man who has been your husband, is a scoundrel, and is tired of you. Has he not told you so? And if it be true that he was already married when you first met him, you will never be able to hold up your head again. What should be the crowning glory of a woman's life will be to you a misery and a reproach, a nameless child, whose very existence must be explained away from the prying, disdainful eyes of the world. Even your sister, if she knew all, would find it in her heart to say that you were better dead.’”

“Under that bright pathway was forgetfulness and peace. For the third time my footsteps turned in the direction of the river, when, just as I stood on the brink, a hand clutched my arm, and a voice I knew spoke in my ear.

“As I started and turned, Leila Montgomery, for it was she, uttered an exclamation of surprise as she caught sight of my face.

“‘Miss Knight—Mrs. Trevelyan! How did you get here? How ill you look! Is Sergius with you?’”

“I wanted to hurry away, but she insisted on following me, and was exceedingly kind in her rough way. She informed me that Sergius had quitted the company unex-

pectedly a few days after I had been left behind, declaring that he was going back to 'the only woman who had every really loved him.'

"'Of course, we all thought it was you,' pursued Miss Montgomery, 'though he is a regular Don Juan, I must say! It was me had the sending off of him chiefly. The more I thought about you, the more I felt you were speaking the truth when you and I had that flare-up, and that you really didn't know he was married to Millie Clements on a singing tour in America three years ago. You were so stuck up in the dressing-room, and so close about your affairs, that nobody told you anything. But when he left you behind like that, we all thought it pretty mean of Trevelyan, and as I'm never too particular what I say, I slanged him before the whole company on the stage one night when he was trying to make up to me, and let him know what I thought of him for his treatment of you. Next day he was gone, without so much as giving notice or asking for his week's salary, and not one of us has heard anything of him since. I rather think I made my gentleman ashamed of himself. And do you really mean to tell me he didn't go back to you after all?'

"Any flicker of hope I might have had, and it could only have been a very little, died right out of my heart while she was speaking, and it seemed as though the very bitterness of death passed over me. She wanted to help me, but I hardly heard her. I just remember thanking her, and telling her that I required no assistance and was going back to my home and my friends. Then, before she could stop me, I left her and ran away along the towing path. By the arches of the bridge a rough group of watermen were talking and laughing loudly. You know what a coward I have always been, Dolly, and how I would always rather run a mile than face a drunken man. I turned away from the river and crawled up the stone

steps of the bridge. There I found a recess and a stone seat. I sank upon it, with my head against the coping, and I suppose I must have fainted or fallen asleep, for a blessed pause came in which I remember nothing.

"Before I opened my eyes, I heard the wind rustling in the poplars and the river swirling under the arches below, and I listened at first without understanding. Then it seemed to me that someone was telling me a story about a poor, wretched girl who had been vain, and self-willed, and silly, and thought to make her fortune on the stage, and how she came to utter shipwreck and lay dying of starvation and a broken heart on Richmond Bridge, under the stars with the sound of the water and the rustling trees in her ears:

"'Girls should be able to take care of themselves. Don't tell me the fault was all on one side.'

"I could hear their shrill women's voices on the one side, and on the other a minority of those professional philanthropists who would want to make a lost sheep of her, and pet her and pry into her past experiences, and if only they were dark enough, desire to make a public show of her as a converted sinner. But between the two sets of women I could see no sympathy for such a girl as this, who had believed herself a wife, and had placed such faith in the solemn service of the Church that she could not see wherein she had sinned at all.

"But it was all like some one else's story. How could it affect me, Phyllis Knight, Dorothy's sister, except that I was very sorry for the girl?

"A light flashed into my eyes and brought me back to wretchedness and reality. A policeman was holding a lantern before my face and telling me I could not sleep all night upon the bridge. When he saw that I was almost too weak to stand, he was very kind, and took me to his wife, who made me up a bed and gave me food, and

was very good to me. But they were poor people, with a large family, and were naturally curious about me; so while the woman was out marketing in the evening for Sunday I put a few pence I had left on the table, and began very slowly, by easy stages and waiting for nightfall to make my way home.

"Just to die in your arms, Dolly, dear. I knew, I felt sure, my strength would hold out long enough for that. But you must put over my grave: 'Phyllis, wife of S. Trevelyan;' Dolly, be sure you do that. I don't know whether it will make much difference in the next world; but, oh! it makes so much in this. And there will be no slur upon you, then, dear, and Cresswell need never know.

"There! It is all told now. Kiss me, Dorothy, and I shall know you are fond of me still. And now let me sleep."

CHAPTER VII.

WAYS AND MEANS.

For a long while after Phyllis had fallen asleep, Dorothy lay awake in her trim white bed in the little room she had occupied for the past three years, thinking deeply.

The two things in her sister's story which she found herself unable to understand were, first, that Phyllis should ever have loved such a man as Sergius Trevelyan, and second, that she had not tried to kill him when she discovered the full measure of his villainy.

Dorothy's whole form grew hot with burning indignation, and her fingers clenched instinctively as she thought of him. She was already fully determined to find him out, in order to have absolute proof of his statement concerning a former marriage, as well as to wreak vengeance upon him for his infamous conduct toward her beloved sister. How she was to effect this latter project she hardly knew. Of course, the law would not help her, as Phyllis would naturally shrink from the shame and publicity of prosecuting him for bigamy; but Dorothy nourished vague projects of denouncing him to his relations and friends, of branding him as a coward and a felon, or even, if it were possible, striking him across the face with a horsewhip, since, as she told herself bitterly, "we have no man to protect us and avenge our injuries."

At this moment, indeed, the very name of man was hateful to Miss Knight. Before she came to bed she had scornfully destroyed the long, bright letter she had been writing to Phyllis when the latter's cry disturbed

her. Lying here in the darkness Dorothy blushed hotly as she recalled her own foolishness in letting her thoughts dwell for awhile upon a man of whom she knew nothing at all but what his own bare word afforded her, and who, in all probability, she told herself as she dismissed Mr. Aylmer Read from her mind, had in his own time and fashion broken the hearts of such girls as were silly enough to believe in him.

"But not mine!" she whispered to herself fiercely through her clenched teeth. "No man shall break my heart, please heaven!"

The character of Artemis was one Dorothy believed congenial to her, and strove to emulate, although Nature had cast her in far too womanly and impulsive a mold to enable her to play the part. She could hardly lie still in her bed, so hotly did her blood boil with fury against the destroyer of her sister's peace. Her imagination, always vivid, pictured the poetic appearance which had first caught Phyllis' attention. In the air before her she seemed to see Sergius Trevelyan's large eyes, long lashes, curly, black hair and mustache, and graceful figure. She even fancied, so strong was her ecstasy of hate, that she could hear that melodious voice which had so charmed her sister's ears, reading aloud selections from his favorite poets, and becoming maudlin and sentimental under the combined misfortunes of an empty whisky bottle and the decline of love.

"Miserable snake! I wish I could kill him! My poor, poor girl!"

Tears gushed from her eyes and rained down her face as she recalled her sister's former dimpled prettiness of the true fascinating order, alluring in the audacious coquetry of perfect innocence. That a man should crush so sweet a flower for his evil pleasure produced in Dorothy's mind a temporary feeling of hostility against all men. To

say that Phyllis was sadly changed would be to understate the case; these few weeks of sorrow and suffering had transformed a light-hearted, willful little beauty of nineteen into a worn and saddened woman, who might from her looks have been fully ten years older.

Sleep was not to be thought of by Dorothy that night. She had much, very much, to arrange for the morrow. Hers was always the managing brain of the household, for Phyllis liked to have everything arranged for her, and Cresswell, beyond a limpet-like fidelity, possessed few marked characteristics of any kind. So that Dorothy, placed too early in a position of absolute authority, had been led to exaggerate her own firmness of character, and to confuse strength of feeling with strength of will.

One great trouble loomed darkly before her—the question of money.

It was impossible not to see that Phyllis required most careful nursing, nourishing diet, and the best medical skill procurable. Failing these, in her state of physical and mental prostration, there seemed little likelihood that she would preserve her life and reason through the trial which lay before her.

And Dorothy had no money at all.

The rent of number one, Lockhart Cottages, was but ten shillings a week, and the patient Cresswell was perfectly willing to work without wages. For the past eighteen months Dorothy had been very busy executing hand-painted cards and album pages for a city firm, and regularly once a week she had taken her way to the neighborhood of Smithfield in order to deliver a bulky parcel of work, and receive in return from five-and-twenty to five-and-thirty shillings, according to the low rate of pay given for that class of art work. Recently, however, the demand for hand-painted figures and flowers had dropped, and, to her dismay, Miss Knight had

learned that the particular firm who employed her proposed shortly to dispense with her services in that direction. The girl's British Museum sketching had been undertaken solely with a view to supplementing her knowledge of figure drawing, as she had no money to obtain lessons, and her experience as an artist behind the scenes of the Grassmarket was the first of its kind, so that she could not yet know whether her sketches would be accepted.

Meantime Phyllis, whom she had believed to be happily in the receipt of two pounds ten a week until the approaching midsummer, was absolutely penniless, heavily in debt, without even suitable clothing, and in need of immediate help; there was hardly anything in the house worth selling or pawning, and all the money which Dorothy possessed in the world was thirty-three shillings in hand and one pound five in the Post Office Savings Bank.

Racking her brains in the endeavor to see a way out of their difficulties, Dorothy decided that the business of eating "humble pie" to their own wealthy relative was so eminently repugnant that it must only be undertaken as a last resource. The personage in question was not even a blood relation, but only a great-aunt by marriage. Dorothy had not seen this lady for some years, but knew that she was greatly incensed against the late Mr. Knight. Help for Phyllis was hardly likely to come from that quarter, she decided, almost with relief, for the notion of humbling herself before a consequential and purse-proud woman was intensely distasteful to her.

Meantime, a doctor must be found at once. The sisters' health through all their trials had been so uniformly good that it was necessary to discover a physician who would undertake the case.

At seven o'clock, when Dorothy rose, Phyllis was still

sleeping heavily—the dead, motionless repose of utter exhaustion. In the morning light her face looked paler and more hollow in the cheeks than on the preceding evening. Like a lifeless thing she lay, her long, dark lashes in sharp contrast against her white skin, and the aureole of pale straw-colored hair tossed over the pillow and toning to a natural dark-brown for half an inch above the roots.

Dorothy tenderly kissed her sister's wasted hands, trying vainly to restrain her tears, and registering anon in her heart a vow of vengeance against Sergius Trevelyan.

In her anxiety on Phyllis' account she decided that the best-known doctor of the neighborhood should attend upon her. The man with the largest house and door-plate and practice would be also, in all probability, better able to wait a little while for his money—at least, until Dorothy had a chance of earning it. Acting on this conviction, Miss Knight found herself at half-past eight o'clock before the door of Dr. Morgan, whose stately man-servant scarcely troubled to conceal a yawn as he stared superciliously on the shabbily-dressed matutinal visitor.

Luckily for Dorothy's errand, the doctor himself came down his broad oak staircase to breakfast while she still parleyed with the man in the hall. Dr. Morgan was a tall, well-built man of about sixty years of age, with a fresh-colored skin, a short silver beard and mustache, and singularly shrewd and kindly blue eyes.

The sweetness of his visitor's voice and the beauty of her face arrested his attention, and, much to his servant's disgust, he at once led the way into the consultation room, listened with much kindness while she stated her sister's case, and promised to come round to Lockhart Cottages within half an hour's time.

Lockhart Cottages were not used to visitors of such distinguished appearance, and the doctor found himself

wondering greatly how a girl of refinement and education came to live amid such humble and poverty-stricken surroundings, the while the numerous brood of children, belonging respectively to the charwoman who lived next door, the sweep who lived over the way, and the lady who took in mangling, assembled to stare upon the great man when he left his carriage and came up the paved way between the Board School buildings to Dorothy's door.

He was yet more interested when a second pale and beautiful woman, singularly like his first acquaintance, was introduced to him as his new patient. Phyllis was with difficulty aroused from her heavy, lethargic slumber nor could she easily be made to understand the questions addressed to her. Dr. Morgan's practiced eyes instantly took in the signs of cruel anxiety of the mind and semi-starvation of the body which the invalid only too plainly showed. Drawing Cresswell apart, as the oldest woman present, he began to question her about her young mistress.

But Cresswell burst into tears. She was a short, thin woman of fifty, with handsome aquiline features, which, together with a habitual gravity and taciturnity, impressed observers with a sense of dignity and intelligence which she was far from possessing.

"Don't ask me, sir," she cried, nervously. "Ask Miss Dorothy. Miss Phyllis only came back last night while I was abed and asleep. When I found her here this morning it gave me such a turn; I can't get over it! She is that altered, too, I don't know her."

"Where is her husband?"

"Oh, don't ask me, sir. I didn't know she had one. Leastways, don't take it from me. She may have got married without telling us. But she'll get well, won't she, sir?"

"Ask your mistress to come down and speak to me," was the doctor's only answer.

In the little front sitting-room Dorothy found him studying the contents of the book shelves with his back to the door. Turning as she entered, he fixed his keen blue eyes upon her.

"Your sister is in a very bad way," he said, abruptly. "Where is her husband?"

Dorothy grew red and white by turns.

"He is in the country," she answered, constrainedly. "I don't know his address, and my sister is too ill to tell it to me," she added quickly.

"I hear she only came here last night. She was not in a fit state to travel."

"She walked here from Richmond," burst from Dorothy, who forgot her reserve in her anger.

"Walked! Good heavens!"

He turned his back upon her quickly, and stood before the book-shelves again, that he might not see the passionate indignation and pain on her face. He already guessed as much of the case as Dorothy could tell him.

"Dr. Morgan," she said, as soon as she could control her voice, "my sister is only nineteen. While she was away from me last year she had the ill-fortune to meet and marry a cowardly scoundrel, who has deserted her and left her to starve. Thank Heaven, she managed to make her way back to me. I know her heart is broken, but you can save her life, can you not?"

The doctor looked kindly down into the girl's beautiful, eager face. It was a terrible pity, he decided privately, for girls to be so poor, and at the same time so remarkably handsome. Theirs was not the safe, statuesque beauty such as a man may comfortably worship from afar, or happily give in marriage to another man; but essentially soft, feminine, and innocently alluring. Even Dr. Mor-

gan felt more cousinly than fatherly as he contemplated Miss Knight's lovely flushed face, appealing grey eyes shining through tears, and parted rose-pink lips. Girls of that type were bound to be worried with passions and romances and tragedies if they were not married off young, and the only wonder in the doctor's mind was that it was the younger and by far the less good-looking of the two, who was the sufferer on this occasion.

"I will do my utmost for your sister," he said kindly. "Get this prescription made up immediately; she must take it every two hours. A little weak brandy and water and some beef tea must be given at frequent intervals during the day. I will call again in a few hours' time. Your sister has simply no pulse at all. She will require constant watching and attendance night and day. From what I have seen of your old servant she does not seem a suitable person to have in a sick room, and you yourself don't look too robust. A trained nurse should be engaged at once."

"I can undertake the night-work," faltered Dorothy, "but during the day I generally have a good deal to do and cannot be always at home."

She already saw beggary staring them in the face. Two pounds eighteen would certainly not go far with a trained nurse in the house demanding two guineas a week and her food, and with no more painting orders coming from the city. Something of the consternation she felt must have shown itself in her face, as Dr. Morgan's next words proved.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "you have relatives or friends in London? They should certainly be informed of your sister's condition, and of the care and necessary expense required in such a serious case as hers. I will not disguise from you that her life and her reason are equally in danger at the present time. The body is absolutely ema-

ciated, and the mind crushed by some terrible shock or strain. Neither one nor the other is in fit condition to pass safely through the ordeal before her, and——”

“Don’t!” cried Miss Knight, suddenly pushing out her hands with an imploring gesture. “I can’t bear to hear it! I beg your pardon, Dr. Morgan,” she added in a low voice, while a deep flush passed over her face, “but—I can’t quite explain what my sister is to me. Our mother died when we were very little children, and our father three years ago. Our only brother left England years ago. We do not know what has become of him. Phyllis is all I have in the world. You cannot tell by seeing her now what she was only a few months ago. And—perhaps the poor darling’s wretchedness may have given you a wrong idea—before last Christmas she was married to an actor in the same company with her in the town of Sheffield. I have never seen him, but he must be the lowest and vilest thing on earth to have treated my sister so cruelly. You don’t know how sweet, and good, and bright, and pretty she has always been. Of course,” she went on, turning sharply away, and pressing her handkerchief tightly against her eyes to force back her tears, “I ought not to bother you with these details. My sister shall have just what you order, Dr. Morgan. I will take your advice and consult with our relatives. For we have quite rich relations,” she continued, with a little nervous laugh, “although it seems difficult to believe of people living in Lockhart Cottages, and we used to live decently ourselves once. But that time passed away three years ago. Please let me know where to go for the nurse. My sister must have everything she requires—and I am sure you will save her if any one can.”

She turned the full gaze of her clear eyes trustfully upon him. Dr. Morgan was deeply interested in this beautiful, emotional creature, over whose face the course of every

feeling was plainly shown. Her pride and weakness, her repellent coldness and appealing gentleness alternately combined to make up a personality as fascinating as it was out of the common run of his experiences. He thought about her for fully half an hour after he had returned to his spacious, solemn house, presided over by his widowed sister. But a fashionable doctor has many demands upon his time, his skill, and, above all, upon that quality which some call sympathy, and others magnetism. Between his first and second visit to Lockhart Cottages upon that particular Sunday, Dr. Morgan was successively called to the bedside of a wealthy paralyzed octogenarian, an anemic schoolgirl, and a middle-aged dipsomaniac, and the keen edge of his sympathy was by necessity blunted by such exhausting contact. On the occasion of his second call upon his new patient her sister was absent, having perforce summoned up sufficient endurance to face an interview with Mrs. Julia Knight, of Belvidere Gardens, Hyde Park, the wealthy widow of her father's uncle.

Mrs. Julius Knight lived and dined in a spacious stucco mansion in Bayswater. Advisedly be it mentioned that she dined, for dinner to Mrs. Knight—a perfectly served, admirably cooked dinner—was the aim and end of existence. To entertain friends at the evening meal, to dazzle them by the expensiveness of her silver and her hand-painted dessert plates, the excellence of her chef's entremets and the bouquet of her wine cellar's treasures, these were the chief joys of Mrs. Julius Knight's choosing, and they ranked almost higher in her estimation than the blessed privilege of wearing more expensive gowns and better diamonds than any of her guests could afford to display.

The late Mr. Julius Knight had been something highly successful in the city. In middle age he had married a plump, talkative and handsome foreign lady, who for ten

years alternately snubbed and patronized him, while she divided what affection she had to give between her favorite dog and her favorite nephew, the latter being Harold Knight, father of Phyllis and Dorothy.

Circumstances had intervened to severely test the partiality shown by Mrs. Julius Knight for her husband's nephew, and with the remembrance of them weighing heavily upon her heart, Dorothy stood on the steps of her great aunt's huge grey stucco mansion in Bayswater in the afternoon of that midsummer Sunday, and asked the pompous footman who opened the door to convey her card to Mrs. Knight and ask if that lady could grant her a few minutes' conversation.

This was the second time in one day that a footman had looked down upon Miss Knight, with a fine contempt for her shabby clothes effacing any possible admiration of her beautiful figure and face. Dorothy felt this bitterly, knowing quite well that her aunt's servant's "young woman" would be much smarter on her Sundays out than she herself could ever afford to be.

"Very sorry, miss, but Mrs. Knight's hout."

"You had better take Mrs. Knight my card."

The man glanced at it superciliously, but, seeing the name, his expression changed, and he asked her to wait while he "saw whether his mistress had returned." He reappeared very shortly and conducted Dorothy to a little boudoir on the first floor, one of Mrs. Knight's private apartments, which included also her bed-room, her bathroom and her dressing-room.

The boudoir was hung with pale blue quilted satin and panels of looking-glass. The window opened out into a small fernery, and the sunlight glittered on a shoal of goldfish swimming round a marble basin, raised on slender columns a few feet from the ground, and sporting a little splashing fountain. A small, white, long-eared dog

sprang from a cushioned basket to bark furiously on Dorothy's entrance, and two black and white Persian kittens stopped fighting to stare at her with round, gray eyes. A dainty coffee service of eggshell china, set in filagree silver, stood on a little inlaid table before a luxurious sofa plentifully supplied with embroidered cushions, while a chased gold box of cigarettes testified to the foreign tastes of the mistress of the house. Every now and then the room was filled with clear, shrill outbursts of song from one or other of the canaries in gilded cages, of which three were suspended from the ceiling; a half-cut French novel in a yellow paper cover lay on the table, closed upon a jeweled toy of a paper-knife, and the observation of this last expensive trifle seemed to fill up the measure of bitterness which had been accumulating in Dorothy's heart ever since she had set her foot within the house of her wealthy relative.

The paper-knife was of oxidized silver, set with tiny pearls and turquoise, and as her eyes fell upon it, Dorothy saw in her mind that picture of a deserted, half-starved woman, huddled on a bench of Richmond Bridge, with her wan face upturned to the stars.

A stifled sob rose in her throat; she left the seat and stood with her back to the door, trying to force down her tears. A rustle of stiff silk skirts made her turn suddenly to find her great-aunt looking at her critically through a pair of long-handled tortoise-shell eyeglasses, on which her monogram was written in diamonds.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOROTHY VISITS HER AUNT.

Mrs. Julius Knight was a very tall, very stout woman of sixty, who still retained some pretensions to beauty of a mature and fully-developed order. Her elaborately dressed hair was only a little streaked with gray, and her well-opened black eyes, of naturally quick and even bel-ligerent expression, looked out upon the world almost as brightly as they had done thirty years before. Her dinner gown was of pink and gray brocade hung with costly white lace, and upon the ample surface of her neck, in her ears, and on her fingers, diamonds and sapphires flashed and gleamed.

"So!" she exclaimed, in a loud, clear voice and strong foreign accent, "it is my niece Dorothy. At last she gives herself the trouble to come and see her aunt. It is to ask a favor, hein? Do not tell me; I know the world. When one neglects one's best friends for three or four years one comes not in to say: 'What fine weather we have to-day!'"

Dorothy's eyes were lowered, and a deep flush of shame spread over her face.

"I did not think, Aunt Dorothea, that you would care to see me."

"Oh, well, I do not say I am proud of the connection," Mrs. Knight returned sharply. "My nephew Harold, your father, who cheated me out of five thousand pounds of my money, and then put a bullet through his head because he could not square his clients' accounts—that is

not a relation to be very proud of, hein? It is not very good for one's name in the world to have a nephew like that."

Dorothy had grown very pale, but her eyes flashed ominously.

"Perhaps," she said, trying to steady her voice, "it has been a little hard for his daughters, too."

Mrs. Knight looked at her quickly for a moment, then she shrugged her plump shoulders.

"After all," she said, "you were such children, not much more than sixteen and seventeen, and your father, in spite of the muddle he had made of his affairs, left, so they told me, a few thousands."

"Every penny of which was paid to his creditors within a few weeks of his death," Dorothy returned, looking her relative proudly in the face. "Mr. Sutcliffe, our father's lawyer, could have told you that had you asked him."

Mrs. Knight was silent for a few seconds, and something like regret swept over her face.

"Enfin! How, then, have you lived?"

"We haven't lived, Aunt Dorothea. We have existed only, as best we could. I raised about eighty pounds by selling some trinkets of mamma's, and poor Cresswell, who would not leave us, lent us thirty pounds. I took a cottage near Hammersmith, after hunting a long while for any place cheap enough for us, and we have managed somehow until now with teaching drawing and music, and with my designs, and—other work."

She hated to have to relate her sister's story, at least until her great-aunt's pity and interest had been aroused.

"Tut, tut!" muttered Mrs. Knight, beginning to rustle restlessly about the room. "It is absurd! I never through—well, why did you not come to me?"

"How could I?" burst indignantly from Dorothy's lips, "after the angry letter from you which poor papa received

on the very day he died, telling him not to hope for any help from you for himself or for us? I believe that letter, coming as it did just when he was half mad with worry over his losses and his mistakes——”

She stopped abruptly. Mrs. Knight stood before her, her dark eyes ablaze with anger.

“So!” she exclaimed, “you are come here to-day, my dutiful niece, to tell me that I killed your father?—that I am a murderess?”

“I came to say nothing of the kind,” rang from Dorothy, half-distracted. “I came to ask for help for my sister, who is half-starved and dying!”

The words “half-starved” impressed Mrs. Knight more strongly than any others Dorothy could have chosen.

“Not half-starved!” she exclaimed, in a low, shocked voice; “do not say that, my niece!”

“Yes, it is true! Half-starved and dying on Richmond Bridge only two nights ago. Desperately ill, and deserted by her husband. Think of it, Aunt Dorothea. I would never have come to you for help for myself. I am quite well, and I can work. But the doctor has seen Phyllis to-day, and he tells me that she will be very, very ill for many weeks yet; that her life and her reason are both in danger, and that she must have good wine and soups, and nourishing food, and expensive medicines, and a trained nurse to be with her night and day. And I—I haven’t three pounds in the world!”

She broke down at last, and, covering her face with her hands, wept bitterly.

Mrs. Knight looked at her, fidgeted about the room, and then, coming up behind her, shook her roughly but not unkindly by the shoulders.

“Do not cry—do not cry!” she said. “Of course I will help you. I will send you some good wine and good

soups. It was very silly not to come to me before. It was your naughty, stupid pride, and I will pay the doctor, the nurse—everything. Leave off crying, do you hear? It upsets me and makes me ill to see crying, and in half an hour my guests for dinner will arrive—Sir John Simpson and his wife, and the Baroness Wiegenthurn, and Dr. Westall, and Alderman Jackson. If you cry you will make me cry, too, and that will spoil my looks and make me ill. Now, sit down by me and tell me the truth. How did you allow your sister to leave you and get married? And who is her husband? What is his name? Where did she meet him? Why was I not told? All this is very serious, and I must hear the truth—all the truth.”

She settled herself comfortably among the cushions of the sofa and motioned Dorothy to a place beside her, taking the girl's thin hand between her plump, bejeweled fingers. Thus encouraged, Miss Knight dried her tears and began her story.

“Two years ago, when Phyllis was seventeen, I wanted her to become a governess; but she hated the idea, and would go on the stage.”

“Ah! surely you did not let her?”

“I tried to prevent it. But she got an engagement at a guinea a week in London, and then a year later another at thirty shillings. We were very glad of the money. In the autumn of last year Phyllis went away to travel for two seasons of twenty weeks each with a great London success. She was to have two pounds ten a week, and it seemed a fortune to us. For eight months I did not see her. I wrote constantly, and she answered sometimes. I hoped to see her at Christmas, but—well, it doesn't matter now. Aunt Dorothea, remember, last year she was only eighteen; she had never been away from me before, and the people on the tour were common, selfish and uncongenial. She had no companions or friends except one

man, very handsome, and educated as a gentleman. He tried his utmost to make Phyllis fall in love with him, and at last he succeeded.

A hard look came about the corners of Mrs. Knight's mouth. She had never been in love herself, and had little sympathy with victims of the tender passion.

"What was the man's name?" she asked coldly.

"He called himself Sergius Trevelyan."

"Called himself! What do you mean?"

"On the stage, aunt, people generally take other names. Trevelyan was not his real name."

"What was his real name, then? I do not understand these theatre customs."

"I—I don't know."

"You don't know the name of your sister's husband!"

Mrs. Knight's round, black eyes opened wider than ever.

"Don't you understand, Aunt Dorothea?" cried Dorothy in desperation. "Phyllis is half-delirious from illness, and can tell me nothing. She only came home to me last night very late, having walked all the way from Richmond, although she was almost too weak to stand. To-day she hardly knows me, and cannot speak above a whisper."

"And where is her husband?"

"She does not know."

"Allons!" exclaimed Mrs. Knight impatiently. "It is too absurd—this husband who has no name and no home! Dorothy," she went on sternly, "I hope that you do not deceive me. I hope that he exists, this wonderful husband."

"How could you suspect Phyllis of doing anything that is not good and pure?" exclaimed Dorothy, starting up from her seat and beginning to walk up and down the

room with hand interlocked. "Phyllis was married to this Trevelyan at Sheffield last November."

"Why did you not tell me she was married?"

"It was a secret, Aunt Dorothea. He made her promise to let no one know. I only learned the truth last night. And he has cruelly, shamefully deceived her. Two months ago she was informed that when he first met her he was already married, and when she taxed him with it he did not deny it."

"You mean to say," Mrs. Knight put in, looking harder than ever, "that your sister is not the wife of this mysterious person; that she is, in fact, not married at all?"

Dorothy bowed her head, her cheeks hot with blushes for the undeserved shame which shadowed her beloved Phyllis.

"Then I tell you," exclaimed her aunt, rising also and speaking with much emphasis and vigor, "that your sister is deceiving you, and that she has not been married at all? Bah! Do not tell me a man commits bigamy for the sake of a girl like Phyllis Knight! She was never a favorite with me—she was too vain and too pert. You and your father spoiled her. Now you, if you had a little more embonpoint, would be a very pretty girl indeed. But Phyllis—no! It is a fairy tale, this unknown husband and this Sheffield marriage. I have no sympathy, I, with such girls. A girl who is a lady should know how to make herself respected. If she fails, peste! men are men, and she knows what she has to expect. Look at me. I have been beautiful, much, much more beautiful than your Phyllis, and I have also been eighteen and alone in the world. But do you think I would have let a man make a fool of me? No! And nor would you, my niece, Dorothea! As to Phyllis, I cannot sympathize, and I will not see her. She is the daughter of her father, and a disgrace to you and to me. You will do well to put her into a

hospital and forget all about her, lest she make you lost and bad like herself!"

"Stop!" cried Dorothy, trembling with anger. "I cannot allow you or any one to speak in such terms of my sister Phyllis. What has happened to her might happen to any woman, however good—to you yourself as well as any other. The sanction of the church is the one and only safeguard a woman has against a man's wickedness. Such a man as this Trevelyan knows quite well that a woman like Phyllis would never make her wrongs public by prosecuting him for bigamy. She is too gentle and too soft-hearted to desire the punishment of any one she has once loved and trusted, however much he may have injured her. She cannot hate as I can. But every true woman should surely help and protect her now, when by a man's wickedness her heart has been broken and her whole life spoiled."

"A man's wickedness," Mrs. Knight repeated impatiently. "Bah! You speak as a child, my niece. That sort of wickedness is half-and-half. I have not a doubt Phyllis has deceived you. She went on the stage, she got into bad company, and she invented all this charming little story of a false marriage to account for the result. It is a fairy tale. If she had really been married, think you she would have kept it a secret from you? I know human nature—girl's nature. If a girl gets an offer, presto! she writes to a hundred particular friends; but if she gets married, even if it is to a pauper with one eye, what does she do but advertise in all the papers, and send out cake and cards so that all the world may know she has at length got a husband? No! Phyllis is a silly girl, and a bad girl, but her lies are of no use with me!"

"I will not stay to hear my sister insulted!" cried Miss Knight, her eyes ablaze. "Good-by, Aunt Dorothea, and I will pray God to send you a little charity."

"Ah, à propos! Charity is what you came for," returned her aunt, getting angry, too. "Beggars, Dorothy, must not be choosers of the words they receive with their gifts."

"I would rather we both should starve than that we should accept anything from you now," retorted the younger woman, and without another word she had walked down the two flights of stairs and out at the front door of thirty-seven Belvidere Gardens in rather less time than it takes to relate it, leaving her great-aunt in a state of high indignation and considerable astonishment.

To her credit, be it said, that after forty years of pampering and flattery, Mrs. Knight felt exceedingly uncomfortable on the subject of her young relative, and not without a secret admiration for the girl who, while possessing on her own confession less than three pounds in the world, could yet resent so fiercely any attack on her sister's good name from the woman whose help she came to crave.

Within a very few minutes of Dorothy's hasty departure, one of Mrs. Knight's servants was sent in search of her, with orders to bring her back immediately. His mistress meanwhile wrote out a check for fifty pounds, payable to Miss Dorothy Knight, which gift, however, was never destined to reach that young lady. The lazy and supercilious footman greatly resented being sent out on Sunday evening in chase after a shabbily-dressed young woman; he did not see her, nor did he try to do so, but he returned after half-an-hour's pleasant stroll in the park to report that she had completely disappeared.

Mrs. Knight for once failed to enjoy her dinner, and on many subsequent days her thoughts flew to the two sisters, leading their struggling, starving existence in the little cottage near Hammersmith, in which unfashionable neighborhood Mrs. Knight's fat carriage horses were fre-

quently to be seen about that time. But although she told herself that the girl's pride would of a certainty give way, and that they would then again apply to her, her expectations were unfulfilled, and to the last day of her life she was never fated to again behold Harold Knight's orphan children.

As to Dorothy, long before she reached home she knew what a mistake she had made, and bitterly reproached herself for letting her temper get the better of her judgment. She tried to comfort herself by determining to devote the whole of the next day to seeking fresh employment in drawing. It was also absolutely necessary, as she told herself with a shudder of repugnance and disgust, that she must find out where this Sergius Trevelyan was hiding, and have an interview with him. He must be forced to give names, dates and proofs with regard to his previous marriage, if such indeed had taken place at all. His real name must also be found out and his relatives communicated with, so that he might be forced to provide for Phyllis. Perhaps even his wife, Millie Clements, whom he had met on a singing tour in America, might be induced to divorce him since desertion and bigamy could be proved, in which case Phyllis might still be legally married to him.

"If, indeed, she desired such a position," Dorothy thought, with lip curled in disdain. "For my part, I would die rather than accept the name of such a cur. But my poor darling does not take things as I do."

The nurse chosen by Dr. Morgan arrived that same evening, a kindly, business-like person, in whom Dorothy at once placed entire confidence. Phyllis was desperately ill; youth and a clear health record were upon her side, but Dr. Morgan's questions elicited the fact that Mrs. Harold Knight had died of heart disease, and there were sure signs of heart weakness in her younger daughter.

Half the night Dorothy spent in her sister's room, and half on her knees at her own bedside. She dared not put her prayer for her sister's life into articulate speech; a superstitious terror lest her entreaty should seem impious restrained her. If such terrible misfortunes had undeservedly fallen upon Phyllis in spite of her sister's nightly prayers, might she not just as undeservedly, as it seemed to one who loved her, be cut off from life itself?

But with a hearty vindictiveness worthy of the days of kings and chronicles, Miss Knight prayed that Sergius Trevelyan might be punished for his crime, and that so hard a measure, and more also, might be meted out to him.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW CAREER.

Shortly before the doors of the British Museum were opened to the students and readers, among whom Aylmer Read took his place to watch eagerly for Miss Knight's appearance, that young lady was already on her way to Smithfield on foot, economy being now, more than ever, a necessity with her.

All thought, save of her sister's welfare, she resolutely banished from her mind. She was ready to undertake any work, however exhausting, to earn money for Phyllis' needs; but, alas! the manager of the firm who had so long employed her and other ladies on hand-painting could only reiterate his former statement that "just at present, at any rate, no more work could be given out."

"I don't mind doing it for much less pay," suggested Dorothy timidly, with tears in her eyes.

"Very sorry, but we have a great deal more hand-painted stuff on our hands than we know how to dispose of. The demand for it has almost ceased. Your designs were the best we had. You will easily get other work to do. We will give you any reference in our power."

Sick at heart, Dorothy left the warehouse and repaired to an address furnished her of another firm. Here the same ill success awaited her. It was too late in the season, she was told, to take on new hands. If she called in the autumn something might perhaps be done. After a third venture, which brought her a recommendation to "try painting in oils instead of water-colors," Dorothy

set her pale face westward with tears burning under her eyelids.

She had not the least idea what to do to raise the necessary funds, and yet the money must be found. A despairing rage against the man who brought her sister to this helpless condition filled her heart. If she could find him, stir even his craven soul to remorse and shame, it would be something achieved. Dorothy knew very little about the stage, but she was aware of the existence and the addresses of several theatrical agencies, and it occurred to her that through the help of these she might happily be able to track down Mr. Sergius Trevelyan.

Down Chancery lane she turned from Holborn in the moist, still warmth of a mid-summer noon. She was hot and tired; she had breakfasted long ago off dry toast and tea, and had tramped many miles since that time; but her youth and perfect health triumphed over fatigue, and nine men out of every ten who passed her turned again to look after the beautiful figure in worn blue serge, and the lovely, troubled face under the cheap, shady black hat.

The dramatic agent's office was in the neighborhood of Covent Garden, up a flight of stairs. Round about the doors and in the passage outside, a few men and a great many young women were assembled, most of them talking and laughing with much apparent gayety, and indulging freely in the slang of their profession, which to Dorothy was absolutely unintelligible.

"I hadn't got a dress, my dear, so I just faked one." "When I sang that song they positively got up and eat it!" "Study! Not me! I never study a part for a matinée. I just wing it." "Stupidest part you ever read, my boy. As it was given to me it hadn't a laugh in it. But I've worked a few old pantomime wheezes, and I forget a little more of the author every night, so it's growing really funny." "Yes, I was afraid they'd guy the

piece the first night, and a fortnight later, when I passed the doors, and saw: 'House full; standing room only,' I knew it was on its last legs. But I'm sorry you're out of a shop."

Most of the young women wore fair hair, rather dark at the roots, and all of them had dark eyebrows and eyelashes. Perhaps they were not more painted than are fashionable London belles toward the end of a season; but there was a difference. The "make-up" was cheaper in quality, and there was less attempt to conceal it. All were gayly, in some cases very tastefully, dressed, and the greater portion of the faces showed unusual vivacity and intelligence. Dorothy's appearance excited some curiosity, for those present had nothing to do but gossip and stare about them, with their eyes ever and anon fixed upon the private door of the room where the agent whose services they had come to seek was understood to be shut in with a manager.

An elderly man, with a yellowish, greasy-looking face, who was seated in a corner of the well-filled room, with an air of deep dejection, presently rose, and with much politeness, gently insisted that Dorothy should take his chair. The girl was very tired, and gratefully accepted the attention. From the talk of those about her she presently learned, to her great surprise, that the elderly man in question, who had taken up his position in a farther corner of the room, leaning gloomily against the wall with his arms folded, was the "funniest actor in London," who had just made a hit in a preposterous character in burlesque, and who every night caused shrieks of laughter by his whimsical antics.

While she was still gazing curiously across the room at the sad-faced comedian, the outer door of the waiting-room opened with a flourish, and a gentleman entered, at sight of whom the clerk rose obsequiously, and coming

from behind his desk, began to carry on a whispered conversation with him.

From where they stood, Dorothy, seated near the door leading to the inner office, was immediately within their line of sight; both men looked at her as they spoke, the new-comer, who was by far the taller and more distinguished-looking of the two, with a fixed intentness which was somewhat decomposing. She, on her part, looked up and back at him, irritated at last by the fixity of his gaze. Meeting his eyes gave her nothing of that sense of friendliness and security, and even of previous acquaintance, which she had experienced after that first exchange of glances with Aylmer Read in the sculpture galleries of the British Museum. The stare of this man to-day inspired in her nothing but impatience, nor was there anything in his face which she found to be sympathetic or interesting.

Very few women would have agreed with her in thus ignoring this man's claims to be considered interesting. Dressed in deep mourning, of light, well-made figure and singularly graceful bearing, the gentleman who at first sight was so greatly fascinated by Dorothy's beauty, was himself exceptionally handsome, although of somewhat effeminate and youthful appearance. In complexion he was strikingly fair and very pale; his face was clean shaved and regular in outline, marred only by a slight, a very slight, heaviness in the red under-lip. His brilliant light eyes, under lashes long and curled as a woman's, looked out with a gentle, appealing expression upon the world, and his close-cut hair, in color of the palest—almost silvery—golden, completed a very agreeable and exceptional tout ensemble.

Presently the two men, still in conversation, moved toward the agent's door, upon the panels of which the

clerk tapped with his knuckles, and in response to a loud "Come in," they disappeared within the inner office.

The buzz of conversation, interrupted by the latest arrival, recommenced at once. Nobody knew the fair man, and all were exceedingly curious about him.

Was he a "society actor," or a "toff going to take out a company?" He ought certainly to be a manager from all the fuss made about him. Didn't his clothes fit him beautifully, and wasn't he a darling altogether?

"It is no good, girls," put in a jolly-looking, red-faced, elderly woman to a group of girls who were discussing the new-comer in the above terms. "The Johnny had no eyes except for that pretty girl in blue serge over there in the chair by the door."

As though to prove the truth of her observations, the door of the agent's office opened at that moment, and the clerk came straight to where Dorothy was sitting.

"Do you want to see Mr. Whitlock?" he inquired. "And is it about an engagement?"

"It is not about an engagement," she answered, rising. "But I want to see him very much. I wouldn't keep him more than a minute."

"Well, he can see you now, I think, if you will just give me your name."

"My name is Knight; but Mr. Whitlock has never heard of me."

When Dorothy was shown into the inner office she found the agent, a small, slight man, with fine dark eyes and curt, offhand manners, seated behind a desk in the middle of the room, the walls of which were completely covered by frame photographs of actresses in nearly every possible dress and attitude. Standing with his back to her, studying these, was the fair-haired young gentleman whose appearance had caused so great a flutter among the ladies on the other side of the door.

Dorothy at first hesitated at sight of a third person, but at a gesture of autocratic encouragement from the little agent she approached the desk. A good deal to her surprise, Mr. Whitlock shook hands with her across it.

"You don't seem to remember me," he said. "But I got you your first engagement at the Thespian theatre rather more than two years ago."

"That was my sister, Miss Phyllis Knight."

"Great Scott! What a likeness! I can see now, though, you're much better looking. Well, Miss Knight, what can I do for you? Things theatrical are in a very bad way. By-the-bye, how is your sister?"

"Very, very ill. Dying, I am afraid," Dorothy answered in a low voice. "But I haven't come to talk about either my sister or myself, Mr. Whitlock. I know your time is valuable, and that very many people are waiting to see you. I have come to ask if you can give me the address of a Mr. Sergius Trevelyan, who was a member of the 'Settled for Life' company until about two or three months ago."

Mr. Whitlock leaned back in his chair and gave a short laugh.

"A good many people have asked me for Mr. Sergius Trevelyan's address lately," he observed. "I suppose he borrowed money from your sister, as he did from most people? I'm sorry I can't help you. I've got a West End address which the fellow put on our books a few years ago, but where he is now I haven't the slightest idea."

"I beg your pardon!"

Dorothy and the agent turned in the direction of the third occupant of the room, who now advanced and gravely bowed to Dorothy.

"The Honorable Darcy Derrick—Miss Knight," put in the agent.

The Hon. Darcy Derrick looked very earnestly at the girl as he returned her chilling acknowledgment of the introduction.

"Pardon me for breaking in upon a private conversation," he said gently; "but I could not help hearing the name of a certain scampish distant connection of mine—a very distant connection by marriage only," he added quickly, catching an unmistakable look of aversion on Dorothy's face. "I hope you will believe that I am in no way proud of knowing such a man. But I think I can tell you what has become of him."

"Where is he, then?" asked the agent.

"First let me tell you what I know about him. I have been out of England for some years, as you may have heard, and only returned on my father, Lord Derrick's, death, not long ago. Before I left Italy I received a letter from this fellow, Trevelyan, whom I had never heard of before, claiming my help to pull him out of some hole he had got into, on the score of being the son of a third cousin of my mother's, or something of that sort. I understood from his letter that he was an actor, and he asked for money to enable him to go out to America to join his wife, who, he said, was earning enough money there in some singing company to keep him."

"Ah!" burst from Dorothy's lips in uncontrollable indignation.

"Well, did he go?" asked Mr. Whitlock.

"Presumably. Anyhow, his next letter, which I received about two months ago, bore the Liverpool postmark, and in it he thanked me for enabling him to book a berth on an Allan line steamer, which sailed early the following morning."

"Then Mr. Darcy has been able to tell you just what you want to know," remarked Mr. Whitlock briskly, turning to Dorothy. "I'm afraid it is only throwing

good money after bad to try and dun the fellow. I've had several applications about him, chiefly from young ladies to whom he had promised marriage."

The agent laughed, but Mr. Derrick looked much distressed.

"A man cannot be responsible for the faults of his mother's fourth cousin," he said. "Still, if I had the least idea of the fellow's antecedents, I certainly wouldn't have helped him to get out of the country."

Mr. Whitlock meanwhile was crossing the name of the defaulting Sergius Trevelyan out of his books.

"Is there nothing else I can do for you, Miss Knight?" he asked, for he saw the young lady turn toward the door.

"No, thank you. Good morning."

Her hand was on the door when the Hon. Darcy whispered something quickly in the agent's ear. The latter's face at once dropped something of its surly, bored expression.

"Ah, don't go just directly, please, Miss Knight; I may be able to be of use to you. Would you kindly wait in the next room a few minutes until I can speak to you?"

Much surprised, Dorothy bowed assent and left the room. After an interval of about five minutes, Mr. Whitlock thrust his little dark head out of the door and beckoned her into his office again. This time he was the only occupant of the room, the Hon. Darcy having passed out through the other door.

"Sit down, Miss Knight," Mr. Whitlock began, indicating a chair with a wave of his pen, while he resumed his former place behind the desk. "How would you like to go on the stage?"

"Not at all. I have neither the wish nor the aptitude for it."

"You're the first girl I ever met who didn't think she

could act. Well, I'll put it another way. How would you like to earn some money?"

"Very much, indeed!"

"Eight or ten pounds a week, for instance?"

Dorothy stared at him in astonishment. From her sister's experience she knew quite well that a guinea a week was quite as much as a beginner without money, position, or influence could hope for.

"Mind, it's only for a six weeks' summer tour in the seaside towns," Mr. Whitlock said. "The fact is, the Hon. Darcy Derrick, whom you saw here just now, has come into some money on the death of his father, Baron Derrick, and by way of investing it, he intends taking round a company in a play he's written himself.

Here Mr. Whitlock stopped to laugh at what he evidently considered a humorous notion.

"Whether he loses his money or not is his business, not mine," he went on. "He has asked me to book the tour and engage the company. It will be called 'Mr. Darcy's Comedy Company,' on account of Lord Derrick being so recently dead. The heroine's a very good part—at least, so the author tells me. I haven't read the piece yet, but I suppose I shall have to, sooner or later, for my sins, and Mr. Derrick had thought of engaging Miss Ella Carisbrooke; have you seen her? A great big, handsome, yellow-haired girl, who made rather a hit by her looks in that failure at the Embankment Theatre. Anyhow, when he met you here this morning he thought your face and figure would suit the part, and besides that he seems a sentimental young gentleman, and distressed to hear you had a dying sister who had been cheated out of some money by that disreputable connection of his he'd helped out of the country. So he's told me to offer you the part of Zara, in 'Love's Right,' as he calls his concoction. As to the terms, he leaves them to you, and as,

of course, you will take me for your agent in the matter, on my usual ten per cent commission up to the amount of the first week's salary, I should fix them at ten pounds a week."

"Ten pounds a week," Dorothy repeated blankly. "But, Mr. Whitlock, I can't act!"

"Lots of people make twice that in London theatres who can't act and never will. If Mr. Derrick is such a f—— I mean, if Mr. Derrick is willing to pay you such terms, and can afford them, you take them, and leave the public to find out whether you are worth it. Sixty pounds in six weeks is something in these hard times, even deducting my commission."

"But there are dresses to be got——" began Dorothy, when the agent cut her short.

"Oh, I should make him meet you about those. Tell him you haven't got the money to do justice to the part in the matter of dressing, and he'll shell out right enough."

"Shell out?"

"Yes, plank down the oof—oh, Miss Knight, you have much to learn on the stage, but I really haven't time to teach you. Come, is it a bargain? The Hon. Darcy is coming back in half an hour to know if it is all settled. He's doing the thing in style. You start rehearsing Wednesday at Hastings; rehearse ten days' open Saturday. Company travels four o'clock train to-morrow from Charing Cross Station. If you call here ten o'clock to-morrow morning I'll have your agreement drawn up, get it stamped, and, whether you can act or whether you can't, he'll have to pay you sixty pounds."

"It is impossible," cried Dorothy in bewilderment. "I cannot stay away from home for ten days. It would be very expensive."

"He'll pay half salaries for ten days' rehearsals, and

if you agree I am authorized to give you a check for whatever sum you may at present require."

"Ten pounds!" gasped Dorothy.

Visions of doctor's and nurse's fees, of port wine, soups and tonics for her sister, flitted through her brain.

The agent forthwith wrote a check.

"There you are!" he said, cheerily; "and there," handing her a roll of type-written sheets in a brown paper cover, "there is the part of Zara in 'Love's Right,' for you to study. Call here at ten sharp to sign the contract. This way out. Ta, ta, Miss Knight!"

And so, much against her intention or desire, Dorothy became an actress.

CHAPTER X.

MR. DARCY'S COMEDY COMPANY.

Hastings, Brighton, Eastbourne, Margate, Ramsgate, Bournemouth, and Plymouth.

The names alone, to a girl who loved the sea, and who for more than three years had not feasted her eyes upon it, sounded refreshing in the extreme. The last week in June, the whole of July, and Bank Holiday week in August, were to be taken up by the tour. Parting from Phyllis so soon after the sisters had been reunited was very hard to Dorothy; but Dr. Morgan had promised to look in at Lockhart Cottages at least once a day, the trained nurse was in every way satisfactory, and Dorothy had been very careful to leave behind her fifty envelopes, already stamped and addressed to her at the different theatres where she would be acting, in order that she might hear daily from the nurse or Cresswell of her sister's progress.

Hour after hour Phyllis lay perfectly still, listening to the nurse's pleasant voice as she read aloud novel after novel from a neighboring library to which Dorothy had paid a subscription. Extreme weakness, utter collapse of the nerves, and an anaemic condition of the heart and brain, such were the terms in which Dr. Morgan spoke of her case; perfect rest from all trouble, worry, and excitement, careful nursing and nourishing food, were the chief things needed. She hardly seemed to understand when Dorothy, trying to laugh through her tears, waved a banknote before her eyes, and whispered that she was

going away "just for a day or two, to earn plenty more money very easily."

"So have just what you like, my darling. I have brought you some strawberries and a great bunch of roses and white lilies. We are quite rich now, and whatever you want you shall have."

As Phyllis's eyes turned to the flowers the shadows on her face deepened.

"Lilies are not for me," she murmured, and then relapsed into silence, staring at the flowers, and apparently oblivious of Dorothy's presence.

But when, on the day following, the moment of parting came, and Dorothy, beautiful in new clothes, bent over her to kiss her good-by, Phyllis threw her thin arms around her sister's neck in sudden excitement.

"You are going to find him, are you not?" she whispered eagerly. "To put things right and prove that I am married. Oh, Dolly, prove that, prove that!"

It was a cry of anguish which rang out in the last words. Tears rushed from Dorothy's eyes. How could she tell her of Sergius's flight to America, and, above all, of his statement that he was "going back to his wife" there?

Embracing Phyllis fondly, she laid her head back upon the pillows.

"I will do all I can, you know, darling," she said. "I am only going away because of you, because I want you to have everything you require. You will forgive me for leaving you, will you not?"

Phyllis's soft eyes were fixed upon her with a look of appeal in them, which it cut Dorothy to the heart to see. All her love was lavished on her sister, and Dorothy's was a nature strong both to love and to hate. In those crucial years of a woman's life, from seventeen to twenty, when distant thoughts of love-making and romance creep

into a young maid's day-dreams, making her soft and self-conscious, Dorothy's mind had been perforce absorbed by the problem of how to live, how to make enough money to feed, clothe, and keep a roof over the little household in Lockhart Cottages. That was clearly her first duty, and left her no leisure for dreaming. But on Phyllis, whose nature was weaker, and who had always been a little spoiled, the burden of responsibility had never been allowed to fall, and even now, as she lay exhausted upon her pillows, with clouded brain and sad eyes fixed upon her sister, the comforting thought crept into her soul that Dorothy would make it all right, just as Dorothy had miraculously produced bank-notes when money was most needed.

Dorothy would prove her marriage, would even turn Sergius from the error of his ways, and force him to justify Phyllis's first belief in him, and with this hope at her heart the invalid's eyes closed in sleep.

On that same memorable day when Dorothy started on her stage career, she was destined to behold again the only man who had ever so far inspired in her any strong feelings of interest. Even to herself she would hardly own her disappointment, when, as she drove in the unwonted glory of a cab toward Charing Cross Station, she caught sight of the tall, broad-shouldered figure of Aylmer Read entering the post office by Trafalgar Square, and could not, by the intentness of her gaze in his direction, make him turn and see her. In all probability the entire course of her future life and of Aylmer's also would have been altered could she have succeeded in attracting his attention. Had she only known it, he was buying a post office order to send to that same provincial photographer who had offered to supply him with other portraits of "Mrs. Sergius Trevelyan, née Miss Phyllis Knight." Even if he was not fated to meet her again at

the Museum, even if she was the wife of another man, that was no reason why he should not feast his eyes upon the features of his ideal, however uncomplimentary the camera had been in reproducing her charms. Hence his visit to the post office, with a view to buying pictures of Dorothy's sister, while Dorothy herself was passing in a cab within a few yards of him.

He had only to turn his head to see her, looking prettier than he had ever seen her look yet, in a ready-made gown of tweed, bought in High Street, Kensington, on the previous day for the modest sum of two guineas and a half, and easily fitted to her supple figure. More than that, she, being a creature of moods, had by this time experienced a revulsion of feeling in his favor, and after vehemently hating all men for her sister's sake during the course of about sixty hours, had suddenly veered round and decided that some men were possibly not quite so bad as others, and that among the "not-so-bads" Aylmer Read might be counted.

The Hastings train started at four o'clock. It wanted yet five-and-twenty minutes to that time, as Dorothy saw by the post office clock. A strong impulse, the nature of which she did not in the least understand, tempted her to stop her cab, spring out, and, following Mr. Read into the post office, hold out her hand to him and hear him say "God-speed" to her journey.

She hesitated, grew hot and cold, red and white, thought of his steadfast brown eyes alight with love, thought of his honest directness, his chivalrous courtesy, remembered the warm, close pressure of his hand at parting, and the tone of his voice as he said:

"Only a woman can make a man happy; only a man can make a woman happy."

Then, back upon her mind rushed the memory of her sister's cruel story; of love and trust betrayed, of health,

hope, honor, all destroyed "for one man's pleasure;" and Dorothy, being essentially feminine and unreasonable, froze her heart against Aylmer Read, because Sergius Trevelyan had been found wanting.

"Men's love is worth nothing at all," she whispered to herself, angry at sight of her own blushes reflected in the looking-glass slips of the hansom. "Women are right who just marry for money or position, if they must marry at all. What men call love merely depends upon our good looks, and when those fade, is easily transferred to some younger and prettier woman. I am glad that there exist women, cruel, grasping, and clever, who can make men suffer. I cannot do that, but at least they shall never break my heart as they have broken my poor darling's. It was contemptible of me even to think for a moment of saying good-by to Mr. Read, who would only have amused his colleagues at his office by telling them of the conquest he had made. But no man shall talk like that of me!"

So Dorothy, aghast at her sister's fate, argued down the promptings of her heart, and tried to persuade herself that her stalwart admirer was a gay Lothario, intent on subjugating the fair sex, and boasting of his triumphs. The opportunity of speaking to him passed, and her cab turned into the station.

Here the chief members of Mr. Darcy's "Love's Right" Company were assembled, and directed curious glances toward Mr. Darcy's leading lady as she stepped upon the platform. Among them Dorothy was glad to recognize the short, stout, yellow-faced man, reported inimitably funny, who had given her his chair at the agent's office, who had been engaged at a high salary for this six weeks' seaside tour between two London engagements. Mr. Marmaduke Strutt, as he elected to call himself, or "Old Marmalade," as he was affectionately termed by irrever-

ent friends, was of dyspeptic habit, and invariably plunged in gloom. He scarcely ever in private life ventured on an original remark; but on the stage, by some strange freak of Nature, his every word was productive of uproarious merriment, and the dullest of audiences were cheered by his performances. Apart from his stage successes, he was a kindly dispositioned man, to whom the letter "h" had always offered insuperable difficulties; a great stickler for the proprieties, and admirer of what he considered "gentlemanly" and "ladylike" conduct, and an excellent judge of whisky.

The "leading juvenile," as the gentleman who plays young lovers is termed in stage parlance, was a very tall young man, known as Ernest Devine, with plenty of "go" and a defective delivery, who for ten years had delighted audiences "over the water" by vigorous representations of such easy and straightforward parts as Hamlet, Robert Macaire, Charles Surface, Romeo, and Coupeau in "Drink." With him was his wife, a small, worn-looking, overdressed woman, with keen dark eyes who was ever ready and willing to play anything, from Cleopatra to Little Buttercup, at twenty-four hours' notice.

The aristocratic portion of the troupe was represented by another married couple, Mr and Mrs. Stourton-Chepe (spelled with a diphthong). To these latter Dorothy was at once specially introduced, and it was implied by the Hon. Darcy that their companionship would be very valuable to her. Mrs. Stourton-Chepe was a handsome woman of forty, with kindly eyes and a hard voice. She could never forget Mr. Stourton-Chepe's titled relations, or the dreadful necessity which compelled her and her husband to tour about the country "like vagrants," as she pathetically expressed it. Her husband was a whimsical, little, dried-up-looking gentleman of vast unsatisfied ambition. He and his wife wrangled in public and private

as much as it was possible for well-educated people to do, and it was the general opinion that they only accepted joint engagements in order that neither of them might be separated from their dog, an ugly and surly fox-terrier with very bad manners.

A pretty and lady-like girl named Graham, and her mother, a fussy old lady, who was plainly intent on match-making where the handsome young manager was concerned; and Jack Wyverley, an old friend of the Hon. Darcy's, who had earned a great reputation as an amateur actor, and who always looked as though he were getting over a drinking bout, completed the company, with the addition of the baggageman, and the acting-manager, this last being another friend of Mr. Darcy's, tall, well-bred and impassive, adorned with an eyeglass and a squint, and known as "Bobby Coles."

The Hon. Darcy, Mr. Coles, Mr. Wyverley, and Mr. Stourton-Chepe, between them imparted an extremely smart appearance to the party, and did such justice to their tailors that little Mrs. Devine, unaccustomed to such sartorial splendor, commented upon it to her husband.

"My word, Ernest, aren't we taking a lot of toffs about the country? All of 'em look like princes of the blood, don't they? You and old Marmalade are the only ones who give away the show."

Mr. Devine looked mournful.

"A d—— lot of amateurs," he muttered. "Look at the leading lady, Miss Dorothy Knight! Who ever heard of her, I should like to know? Of course, she's some fashionable novice playing at acting for the fun of it. She'll queer my best scenes, and she's so good looking that our masher manager's sure to take her part. Ugh! The drama's going to the dogs. Talent never has a chance now."

"Remember, Erny, dear," whispered his prudent help-

meet, "that we've been out of a shop three months, and the screw is tip-top. Only I do wish Mr. Darcy could have written in a part for Dick."

Dick was the eldest hope of the Devines, a stolid lad of eleven, who from the age of two had been called upon to represent comic or tragic infants of either sex indiscriminately, and Mrs. Devine felt distinctly aggrieved that her present manager had not seen his way to introduce a child's part in order to show off her son's accomplishments.

The ladies traveled together, and Dorothy was not slow in discovering that a slight but definite feeling of hostility existed against her in that she was a "novice," that worst of crimes in the eyes of an old "professional," and yet intrusted with the leading part. Mrs. Devine felt that she ought to have played Zara. Miss Graham inclined to the belief that she could both have looked and acted it, while her mother was boiling with indignation at the thought that a "wretched amateur" had been put over the head of her Mabel, who had been playing "juvenile" parts for six hardworking years. Mrs. Stourton-Chepe knew herself to be out of the running where young parts were concerned, but she was the only woman in the company acquainted with the Hon. Darcy's reputation in society where women were concerned, and although she dearly loved a lord, and greatly wished to ingratiate herself with Baron Derrick's second son, Dorothy's remarkable beauty inclined Mrs. Stourton-Chepe to look upon her with suspicion. No young and unattended woman had a right to be so handsome. Then, too, Dorothy was not related to the Houghton-Knights of Cheshire, which was a distinct disadvantage; worse than that, she did not seem to want to be, but plainly stated that she had "no distinguished relatives." For all these things Mrs. Stourton-Chepe regarded Dorothy with little favor, while she de-

voutly hoped the girl would not "take it into her head to flirt with dear Stourton. He is so impressionable where a pretty face is concerned."

As to whether the women liked her or not or thought about her at all, Dorothy cared not one straw. She was there among them simply and solely in order to earn sixty pounds to defray the expenses of her sister's illness; she meant to try her utmost to earn the money honestly, but as she felt strongly convinced that under no circumstances would she ever be able to act, she knew that this was probably the one and only occasion in which she would be connected with the stage. This experience came to her as something quite outside her life, and she was so fully occupied in planning how best the money could be laid out for Phyllis' advantage, that she became lost in a reverie and entirely forgot her immediate surroundings.

Hastings on a summer evening was warm with a moist heat, which had lain all day in a blue-grey mist over sea and land. The Stourton-Chepes gave Dorothy some addresses in a fashionable street near their own, but the girl was so eager to save all she could from her personal expenses that she walked about for over an hour until she found for herself two rooms in a mean little red-brick terrace at ten shillings a week, with a woman who did not "object to taking in theatricals."

The question of lodgings being settled and an economical meal of tea and bread and butter disposed of, at nine o'clock the balminess of the evening tempted Dorothy out toward the sea. She did not wish to meet either members of the company or visitors to the town. On the pier and on the parade be vies of young women, chattering and giggling, promenaded together, and endeavored by shrill hilarity and many backward glances to attract the wandering attention of youths in flannel suits and sand-

shoes, who likewise strolled in twos and threes, smoking cheap tobacco. Miss Graham and her mother were taking a constitutional and looking out for the Hon. Darcy and his two friends. Mr. Stourton-Chepe, who, to the disgust of his wife, had struck up a friendship with Marmaduke Strutt, walked up and down, discussing the drama with the melancholy-minded comedian, and Mr. and Mrs. Devine were also on the parade, with their boy Dick, who had been brought down in the hope that a page-boy might be wanted for announcements, or the comedy scenes lightened by juvenile acrobatic performances and imitations of popular actors.

But Mr. Darcy's leading lady was not among the gaily-dressed, moving, chattering throng, and her absence troubled her manager. The Hon. Darcy Derrick was not so young or so inexperienced as he looked, and he saw clearly that Miss Knight was not likely to find congenial companionship among the members of the company. He said as much to his two friends, Bobby Coles and Jack Wyverley, as the three enjoyed an excellent dinner in the best hotel on the Hastings sea front that evening.

"By Jove! What a queen Miss Knight looked among those people on the platform to-day!" he observed, after a short silence, during dessert.

The other men laughed and exchanged glances.

"Gone again, eh, Darcy?"

"I hate that flippant way of talking of a woman," exclaimed the Hon. Darcy angrily. "I never think about that girl without wanting to take my hat off."

"She is better looking than Ella Carisbrooke," said Mr. Coles reflectively. "Better style and all that, of course, and doesn't dye her hair. But Ella looks ripping from the stalls, and—and I don't myself care for your particular, ladylike sort of women on the stage. I like chic and go, and I think the public does, too."

"Don't talk about Miss Knight in the same breath with Ella Carisbrooke!" cried Darcy, his Irish accent coming out strongly as he became excited. "It's sacrilege."

"I agree with Bobby," put in Jack Wyverley, a short, thick-set, old-young man, with a clean-shaved, red face, dazzling teeth, and bloodshot blue eyes.

One of Jack Wyverley's characteristics was that after he had imbibed a certain quantity of wine or spirits he was invariably seized with an excess of truthfulness.

"You're just as bad as you were before you went abroad, Darcy," he declared as he sipped his coffee and liquer. "Five years ago you were raving about Mrs. Lacy, and nobody might say before you she was anything short of a cherubim. When her divorce case came on last year the judge and jury weren't quite of your opinion. Your periodical passions are so sultry while they last that I consider it's a great pity you didn't engage Ella Carisbrooke instead of Miss Knight to play in this piece of yours."

"And why, pray?"

"Carisbrooke is married to old Jackson, the stage manager, at the Embankment Theatre. You'd have buzzed round her without singeing your wings overmuch; her language would have soon choked you off, and after a few little bills for champagne and diamonds, you'd have come out of it all right. But this Miss Knight appears to be a very disdainful sort of young lady, and nothing less than St. George's, Hanover Square, would be likely to satisfy her."

"And why not, pray?" the Hon. Darcy asked again, turning his lustrous eyes upon his friend unflinchingly.

Jack Wyverley stared, showed his handsome teeth in a wide grin, and finished off his liqueur.

"I can only say that the future Mrs. Derrick, whoever

she may be, will have my sincerest sympathy," he observed enigmatically.

"It wouldn't be needed," protested Darcy. "No man with a heart in his body can live without falling in love, and if he has much heart, he falls in love often. But once he meets a woman who is beautiful, refined, intellectual, virtuous, and devoted to him, he always falls in love with the same woman, and she is his wife."

"Here endeth the first lesson!" Mr. Coles intoned with a yawn.

"It won't be Darcy's first, or his twenty-first either," Wyverley asserted.

"The man who cannot love a beautiful woman isn't worth knowing," retorted Darcy. "Miss Knight's figure alone would make a woman with a plain face beautiful. Every curve is perfection."

"Not enough flesh for me," Mr. Coles observed critically, as he lit a cigarette.

"Your tastes are coarse and earthy, Bobby. There is something poetic and ethereal about Dorothy Knight. But I'm aware that you cannot realize female loveliness which weighs anything under twelve stone. The moment my eyes fell upon that charming girl's face at Whitlock's office, I said to myself: 'There sits the heroine for my play, Zara Carewe.'"

"Let's hope she'll be able to act," Jack Wyverley suggested. "It's an awfully risky thing trusting a leading part to a beginner."

"What does it matter to me?" inquired the Hon. Darcy as he rolled himself a cigarette. "I was bound to give my play to the world to show how dramas should be written, and I was also bound to give myself the opportunity of seeing that adorable girl daily. Let's draw our chairs to the window and watch the passers-by."

"On the lookout for the fair Dorothy, eh?" laughed

Coles, as the three men leaned out, smoking, from the private room on the first floor of the palatial red-brick hotel, where they had dined.

The strains of a band as it played the "Cavalleria Intermezzo," then in its first emotional freshness, fell harmoniously upon their ears; they had all dined well, and the more or less direct admiring glances thrown by passing shop-girls at the three smart-looking young men in evening dress, and in particular at the boyishly beautiful face of Darcy, completed their sense of bodily satisfaction. Through the crowds below them at that moment a woman was passing, at whom all the men and a few women here and there turned to gaze with interest. In movement she was exceptionally graceful, and in face and figure too beautiful to walk about alone in an English town, it being characteristic of a section of the male population in England that they cannot distinguish between those ladies who desire their attentions and those others who do not.

More than one specimen of 'Arry in a blazer had already turned in his course to follow Miss Knight in her rapid walk toward the quieter portion of the sea front. In her shabby old serge gown and dowdy hat and veil, her good looks had been far less conspicuous; but now the Hon. Darcy, who from his place at table had been attentively scanning the crowd for the past hour and a half in search of her, instantly recognized her from a distance, and, springing from his seat, seized his hat and light overcoat, and, nodding a good-by to his friends, darted down the stairs and out at the hotel door on his leading lady's track.

Wyverly and Coles looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"He's dotty!" remarked the latter, knocking the ash off his cigarette on the window ledge.

"Crazy Derrick, he used to be called when we were at Eton together," returned Wyverley. "Before he was sixteen he had offered marriage to a barmaid in Windsor, and I haven't the least doubt that he made love from his cradle to his nurse. The joke of it is that he's always in deadly earnest, and so sentimental over it."

"He gets to be rather a bore under the circumstances," yawned Bobby Coles. "He believes in himself so profoundly, you see, and won't be laughed at while it lasts. Let's have a turn on the parade and give the girls a treat."

"A brandy and soda first to drink success to Darcy's latest love affair," suggested Wyverley, to which his friend readily assented, and the two men, exchanging highly amusing anecdotes concerning their former boon companion and present manager, passed presently down to mingle with the crowd.

Dorothy meanwhile pursued her way toward St. Leonards, very little troubled by the attention she excited among the seaside Lotharios. A soft breeze blew from the sea, and the evening air seemed full of lovemaking and laughter. After three years of dull overwork and London streets the change was delightful; but Dorothy turned hot with self-reproach as she felt her heart grow lighter.

"How can I be so unfeeling when my poor darling is lying between life and death at home?" she asked herself, and the elasticity went out of her walk, the brightness from her eyes, at the thought.

Nearing St. Leonards, she met fewer pedestrians at each step until, by the time the parade was passed, the archway, and the unfinished works of a new pier, night was falling, and she found herself at the uttermost end of the sea front, alone. Here on a solitary bench she sat, with hands clasped on her knee, watching the rising moon

as it tipped with silver the curled edges of the waves breaking on the beach.

"Oh, ye who have your eyeballs vexed and tired,
Feast them upon the wideness of the sea."

The words, uttered close behind her, and echoing strangely her own thoughts, made her start violently and turn to find Mr. Derrick a little way behind the bench upon which she was sitting. As she recognized him he threw away a cigarette he was smoking and came up to her.

"Forgive me for breaking in on your reverie," he said gently, "but I saw you from my hotel window pass down in this direction, and as you seemed to be a good deal annoyed by the impertinence of seaside loafers, I ventured to follow at a humble distance as a self-constituted watchdog for the time being."

She bent her head and answered with more than a touch of sarcasm in her tones:

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Derrick. But I am not accustomed to an escort."

"I hope you are not vexed with me?" he said anxiously.

"Not at all. I must be getting back to my rooms now," she said, beginning to rise from her seat. He detained her by an appealing gesture with his hand.

"I shall think you are very angry with me if you let me drive you away like that," he said. "I meant to guard you in silence, but Keats' lines seemed so appropriate that they slipped out in spite of me. Sit here just for a few moments; I particularly want to speak to you about the part of Zara before you first read it at rehearsal tomorrow."

Somewhat unwillingly Dorothy resumed her seat. The Hon. Darcy's fine eyes were fixed worshipfully upon her profile as he, too, sat on the bench by the sea wall, and

racked his brains as to how to detain her. The moonlight lent to her delicate features and firmly closed mouth an almost icy purity. It was certain, he told himself with a throb of delight, that this girl had never in her life cared for any man, and her answer when he suddenly asked her how she liked her new part confirmed him in this belief.

"I really don't know how to play it, Mr. Derrick. I don't understand such a woman. For instance, the way in which she speaks when she first meets the hero seems so very strange to me. How could she feel all that for a man she'd never seen before?"

"Can you not understand?" he asked in a very low voice, which vibrated with tremulous passion, "what it is to fall in love at first sight?"

"No," she answered frankly. Then she thought of Aylmer Read and blushed.

"I have read of such things, of course," she added hurriedly, "and I can understand them, I suppose, in a man, but not in a woman."

"You cannot understand a woman loving?" he asked in a voice still lower than before.

She turned her head and gazed at him, saw his eyes dilated and shining in the moonlight, and forthwith was seized with a sudden and altogether unaccountable dislike which for the moment amounted almost to hatred against him.

It was as though an invisible hand had helped her to rise, tall and stately, from her seat, and a voice which was not her own, but strangely hard and sharp, spoke for her.

"No, Mr. Darcy, I cannot understand it, nor do I care to discuss the subject. Good-night."

CHAPTER XI.

HER FIRST REHEARSAL.

Darcy Derrick did not follow Miss Knight to her door, as she half feared he would do, nor did he utter on this occasion another word in the attempt to soften her sudden resentment against him.

In this he acted most wisely. Knowing women's ways he felt certain that long before she got home Dorothy would blame herself for her rudeness to her employer and manager, and would be inclined to meet him in a softened mood on the morrow. So he remained quietly sitting upon the bench she had left, and rolled and lit another cigarette while he watched his leading lady's graceful figure until it was lost to view.

"That girl is my fate," he murmured half aloud, "the type I have always longed to meet, and have always known I should find irresistible. There is a proud purity about Dorothy which would repel many men, but which attracts me far more than the open coqueties of other women. She is not cold; she is full of dormant fire and passion, waiting only for the kiss of the prince to wake into blossoming life. And I must give that kiss."

A smile shone in his long, light eyes as he turned them again to the sea, and, presently, moved by his love fancies and the quiet of the scene, he drew a notebook from his pocket and wrote by the aid of the moon, and to the accompaniment of the plashing waves, some graceful and tender verses in Dorothy's honor. For quite a long time he remained polishing and correcting them, until their

smoothness so charmed him that he experienced a pang of regret because his father's recent death would prevent him from sending them immediately to a magazine in his own name.

Meantime Dorothy took herself to task, as he had expected she would, over her unnecessary abruptness toward him.

"As he seems the only person in the company inclined to be nice to me, and as he is really overpaying me absurdly out of pure good nature," she told herself, "it is simply senseless of me to let myself be prejudiced against him just because he looks sheepish in the moonlight. But for this windfall in the shape of an engagement, where should I be now? Seeing my poor darling starve to death for want of food I could not buy. Why, I ought to be ready to black Mr. Derrick's boots out of pure gratitude."

Still more reason had she on the following day to appreciate her manager's benevolence toward her. Accepting the engagement as she had done, suddenly and without time for reflection, solely as a means to provide Phyllis with medical skill and the requisite nursing and luxuries, it was not until Dorothy stood in cold blood upon the small, ill-lighted stage of the local theatre that the amazing difficulty of her undertaking flashed clearly upon her startled brain.

To begin with, the part of Zara Carewe was longer than that of Juliet, and to the full as emotional. Even Dorothy, unaccustomed as she was to dramatic compositions, realized that the part was not only intensely difficult, but also very ill-written and unnatural. The heroine of "Love's Right," a Venetian of high rank and matchless beauty, betrothed to an English member of Parliament, was supposed to meet at a reception, in the first act, an irresistible Irishman, addicted to blank verse quotations,

feeble jokes, and long tirades on the subject of his down-trodden country. Unable to resist such a combination of attractions, the fair Zara was supposed to love the Irishman madly at first sight, and to own the same to him in speeches of Swinburnian warmth and inordinate length. Snatching a lace scarf from the back of a chair, she was about to elope with him in a gondola when her flight was intercepted by the return of her future husband, her father and other members of her family circle. Nothing much occurred in the second and third acts, save an immense amount of talking, but finally, the fair Zara, after two years of married life with the English member of Parliament, during which time her sole solace had been reading her old lover's political speeches in the newspapers, decided for the second time to elope with him, this time through a French window in the drawing-room in full evening dress. The English member of Parliament, much upset by overhearing the above arrangement, opportunely arrived upon the scene as his wife and the Irishman passed through the shrubbery by moonlight. Promptly a duel was arranged, but the lady, rushing between the combatants, received her husband's shot in her shoulder and proceeded to die at great length immediately under the limelight. Her last action was to throw herself into the Irishman's arms and kiss him, whereupon the wicked and tyrannical husband, making a step forward to interfere, was waved back into his place at the left-hand corner of the stage by the lofty-minded Irishman, who effusively returned the lady's kiss as she turned rigid in his arms, then, raising his right hand to heaven while he supported her inanimate corpse with his left, he murmured, somewhat enigmatically, "Love's Right!"

At the reading of the play the Hon. Darcy Derrick had hardly been able to refrain from tears at what he conceived to be the poetic truth and beauty of the denoue-

ment. As to the rest of the company, they had stared blankly at each other and devoutly hoped that a long-suffering British public would refrain from personally attacking the actors.

"It's a lot of immoral rot," Ernest Devine had confided to his wife. "But luckily we've got a contract for six weeks signed and stamped, and as nobody's likely to come in after the first night anywhere, we may escape catcalls."

But to the author, Mr. Devine spoke otherwise.

"It'll shape all right, I daresay, when the leading lady's part's cut down a bit," he observed. "But my scenes want a lot of working up. Couldn't you manage to let me die, too, in the last act? Like Romeo and Juliet, you know. I've got a very realistic Romeo death which always fetched 'em."

But the Hon. Darcy could not see his way to altering a line of his masterpiece.

"I haven't the slightest doubt," he said sweetly, "that the critics will hound it off the stage, and the ignorant, pig-headed public will laugh in the wrong place. But by the end of another fifty years or so they will be clamoring for just such a play—all pure passion, poetry, and sentiment, the hero swayed by the two great emotions a man should feel, love of a woman, and love of his country—no vulgar plot, or trivial incidents, no more trite morality preaching, but beautiful souls working out their destiny oblivious of the world of fools outside—that is drama. And long after my play has been hissed off the boards the world will find it out."

At the first rehearsal Miss Knight greatly increased her manager's regard for her, by being the only member of the company who did not apply to have her part altered. She was too intent upon learning her words, and trying to understand them to think of anything else, and her serious intentness and parrot-like repetition of the lines

she had already committed to heart, were in marked contrast to the flippant and indifferent demeanor of the other members of the cast, not one of whom had glanced at his or her part since the reading of the play in London a few days before.

A dead silence fell suddenly upon Dorothy's fellow-players as Zara made her first appearance, holding her brown paper covered book face downward, proceeded to recite, in slow, laborious tones, and blushing deeply from self-consciousness, the heroine's opening speech.

"At last, at last, I am alone! Ah, how my brain burns! Since leaning from my casement yester eve, I perceived in a gondola that face, those eyes upturned toward me, all the current of my life has turned, and stormy waters seem ever and again to rush over my soul. This marriage with Herbert Carewe, which up to now I have regarded with indifference, fills me with dread, with loathing! Ah, could I but see that face again, to read my fate there!"

These lines, enunciated with the halting consciousness of a student of Mavor's spelling book by a lovely young Englishwoman, who obviously felt that she was making a fool of herself, caused an irresistible smile to spread over the faces of the "Love's Right" Company. Only Mrs. Graham from her chair at the side of the stage betrayed no amusement, but gave vent to her indignation in a snort of disapproval.

"A raw amateur," she muttered to Mrs. Stourton-Chepe, who was seated near her. "An incompetent beginner in the leading part, and my Mabel, who has had splendid notices in every newspaper in England, put off with a mere walking lady!"

"My dear Mrs. Graham," her companion observed in her customary acidulated tones, "preferment on the stage does not go by merit. Miss Knight is very beautiful,

and that will no doubt, stand her in lieu of both ability and experience."

"Beautiful!" repeated Mrs. Graham indignantly. "Do you really call that beauty? She looks to me as if she had been starving herself, as so many foolish young women do nowadays, in order to keep their waist small. But that can't be her reason, for her waist is quite unusually large even for a woman of her height. She must measure fully two inches more round the waist than my Mabel, and Mabel never tightlaces. Her slenderness, which has been so much admired, is quite natural. I was just as slim when I was a girl, if not slimmer."

"I believe large waists are the fashion nowadays," returned Mrs. Stourton-Chepe, scanning Dorothy critically through her double eyeglass. "Miss Knight is undoubtedly very handsome, both in face and figure, but, poor girl, her attempts at acting are positively ludicrous."

After the rehearsal Marmaduke Strutt, who was engaged as stage manager, took Mr. Derrick aside for a short confabulation with Ernest Devine.

"It won't do, Mr. Darcy!" he said, shaking his head oracularly. "It won't do to try a novice in the part of Zara. The whole piece is so—well, so unusual, and so particularly risky that only the most careful and experienced acting can pull it through. Now, Miss Knight appears to be an amiable and charming young lady, but she simply doesn't know how to act. Zara requires an actress of experience. Why not let her change parts with Miss Graham or Mrs. Devine?"

"My excellent Strutt," returned his manager, tapping him affectionately on the shoulder, "in the domains of low comedy you are unequalled. I know of no one like you for sitting on a chimney-pot hat and looking at it in bland surprise, or for missing your chair and alighting on the floor, or any such time-honored incentives to

British hilarity. But you really must let me, the author, know the kind of personality I want for my heroine. And let me assure you I do not want a little round-faced, plump, wasp-waisted milliner's apprentice like Miss Graham, or a middle-aged shrew like the excellent Mother Devine."

"Miss Knight will spoil your play, sir."

"Miss Knight realizes my ideal."

Mr. Strutt shrugged his shoulders and walked away. Possibly he might have cherished resentment against Dorothy, regarding her from the ordinary professional standpoint as a conceited amateur, who was crowding out experienced artistes to air her own incompetency, but that, later on in that same day, he met her on the pier and held some conversation with her which altogether changed his views.

"I know you thought me very bad to-day, Mr. Strutt," the girl said humbly. "I had no idea acting was such a difficult business."

"Most stage-struck young ladies think it the easiest thing out," the old actor observed stiffly.

"But I am not stage-struck," she said, turning her clear, gray eyes upon him. "What made you think so, Mr. Strutt?"

The comedian hummed and ha'd a little.

"Meeting you at Whitlock's agency," he said at last, "and afterward here engaged to play the leading part in this—er—drama, I naturally supposed that, like many another pretty young lady who has grown tired of her luxurious home, you had adopted the stage with the idea of becoming a Bernhardt without either temperament or training."

"Indeed, no!" she exclaimed earnestly. "I never dreamed of going on the stage when I went to see Mr. Whitlock on business of quite another kind. And when

he suggested that I should play this part I told him again and again that I couldn't act until——"

"Until you let yourself be persuaded? Well, well, young ladies are naturally vain and fond of excitement and change, and no doubt it will be an amusing experience to you. But do you ever think, Miss Knight, of the hard-working and needy young actresses whom the freaks and caprices of rich young ladies like you keep from earning their daily bread?"

She looked at him with contracted brows and tear-filled eyes.

"Mr. Strutt," she said suddenly in a low voice, "there is something I must tell you, although you are almost a stranger, and it concerns my private affairs. Instead of being a rich young lady, I have had no money but what I have earned for more than three years; and I have taken this engagement because my sister, whom I love more than anything in the world, is very ill, and I want money to buy her all she needs. You won't think so hardly of me now, will you?"

Marmaduke Strutt looked at her, read the truth of her words in her face, and a sympathetic moisture came into his eyes, too. For some minutes they promenaded the pier side by side in silence. Then he turned to her and said, very gently and reverently:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Knight. If I can in any way help you with your part, you would be pleasing me very much by consulting me." c

After that little talk, the stage manager ceased to complain of her, and from his long experience he was able to give Dorothy many valuable hints in the technical part of her work on such subjects as stage gesture, the pitch of her voice, and other necessary points ignored by the stage novice.

As to making her act, that was beyond him. As she

herself had surmised, Dorothy had no trace of the histrionic temperament. Although possessed of exceptionally deep feeling and capable of going to extreme lengths in the direction of either loving or hating, she was neither amorous nor expansive. As a rule, the more she felt the less she was likely to discourse on the subject, and the struggle for life of the past three years had strengthened and confirmed her in a habit of self-repression which, perhaps, had not been originally a part of her nature. Until this point of her life she had had, as she herself phrased it, "no time for love affairs," and the feeling of liking and interest with which Aylmer Read had inspired her was, so far, the nearest approach to sentiment that had touched her heart. The strain of keeping the little household at Lockhart Cottages together, the constant anxiety as to whether the rent and bills would be met, the incessant work, and the feeling of grave responsibility which had devolved upon her at little more than sixteen years of age, had, to all appearance, changed a high-spirited, impulsive schoolgirl into a thoughtful, serious and self-relying woman. Yet in many ways Mr. Darcy's leading lady was as guilelessly ignorant of the world as a child. All chance of social pleasures, flirtations, dances and diversions had been lost to the sisters before they had reached the age for properly enjoying them, and alike by their temperaments and education, they had been debarred from the transient love affairs with chance acquaintances which are the solace of girls in a lonely station of life.

To the ill-written and rhapsodical part of Zara Carewe, therefore, Miss Knight brought inexperience of the passion of love, a keen sense of the ridiculous, a distaste for acting, a preoccupied mind, and a total ignorance of the requirements of the stage. Played by an actress of genius, the absurdities of the part might have disappeared in the opportunities it afforded an emotional artiste of "let-

ting herself go." But as carefully recited by a beautiful novice, Zara Carewe was comical where she was not tedious, and no attempt was made by the other players in "Love's Right" to conceal their opinion of the leading lady's performance.

"I wonder old Marmalade puts up with her," Devine declared. "If I were stage manager I'd order her off the boards. It's an insult to experienced artists to ask them to support such an exhibition."

"Oh, she's mashed old Marmalade," returned his wife snappishly. "That's why he lets her off so easy. Dick has met them out walking together twice lately. I can't think why she should take up with the silly old man, unless it's a try-on to make the manager jealous."

"She's a deep one, that's my opinion," said her husband. "She knows as well as we do that Mr. Darcy is the Hon. Darcy Derrick, with only an invalid brother between him and the title, and that he came into a pile of money when his father died. It's my belief, for all her Puritanical airs, that Miss Dorothy Knight's come to this tour simply and solely to hook him."

Mr. and Mrs. Stourton-Chepe were of the same opinion, for which reason the latter frequently invited Miss Knight to tea, and entertained her by lamentations on the poorness and meanness of the rooms in which hard fate compelled her temporarily to reside.

"These terrible antimacassars, and wax flowers, and horsehair sofas set one's teeth on edge," she complained. "I must really apologize for inviting any one to see me in such a place."

"It is quite a palace, in point of size, at least, to what I am used to at home," Dorothy remarked simply, her frank nature resenting all attempt at pretension. "I live in a cottage, and, therefore, cottage lodgings seem perfectly natural to me."

Mrs. Stourton-Chepe, who boasted a cheerless and uncomfortable West End flat, up many flights of stairs, with an imposing address, looked at the girl critically through her glasses.

"You live in a cottage?" she said. "How interesting! Then, of course, you live in the country?"

"Oh, dear, no; in a very noisy part of Hammersmith. There is quite a wrong impression in the company about me, Mrs. Stourton-Chepe. I believe it is supposed that I am a rich young lady acting for my amusement. It is quite wrong. I have not a penny in the world but what I earn. My parents are dead, and I don't suppose that in all London there lives any one poorer or less distinguished than my sister and I."

"You have a sister, then? Only one? And any brothers?"

Dorothy hesitated. She did not feel inclined to speak of Phyllis to this woman with the hard voice and worldly notions.

"I have a sister," she said at last, rather coldly. "She is very ill. And we do not know if our brother is alive or dead."

"She seems a very superior, highly-educated girl," Mrs. Stourton-Chepe afterward confided to her husband. "And from what she told me she must be so miserably poor that Derrick would be a magnificent catch for her—the chance of a lifetime, in fact. He is positively mad about her, so Mr. Coles and Mr. Wyverley assure me; and he must be infatuated, indeed, if he can put up with her acting. I feel really sorry for the girl, and I shall do all in my power to bring Derrick to the point of proposing."

"H'm! Girls have fancies," her husband objected. "Shall you think it your duty to tell Miss Knight all that you know of Derrick's past?"

"What do I know of it?" his wife asked impatiently. "You knew him at college. Afterward there was some little trouble with his father. Derrick went abroad, and now he has come back reformed. What is an escapade or so on the part of a man when you consider a title and a fortune on the one side, and on the other a tenement at Hammersmith and grinding poverty? I wonder you can be so silly!"

CHAPTER XII.

DARCY'S SYMPATHY.

Two days before the first public performance of "Love's Right," as Dorothy returned from her limited and strictly economical marketing, the landlady opened the door for her and informed her, with a considerable air of mystery, that a gentleman was waiting to see her in the parlor.

"Such a handsome young gentleman, the handsomest ever I saw, and dressed like a prince," she vouchsafed in a hissing whisper, with a smile that was almost a wink. "I told him I didn't think you would be long, and he said he didn't mind how long he waited, so affable and pleasant like."

"It is some message from the theatre, no doubt," said Miss Knight coldly, as she made her way to the small back sitting-room looking out on a paved yard and a high brick wall.

As she had half-guessed, the Hon. Darcy Derrick awaited her. His back was turned to the door, and he did not hear her light footsteps, being evidently deeply absorbed by some object upon the table before him, at which he was gazing fixedly. A flush of vexation passed over Dorothy's face as she perceived that he had taken down from the mantelpiece a photograph frame, within the closed doors of which she carried about a portrait of her sister and herself, taken some two years before, with Phyllis' head pillowed on her shoulder.

At the sound of her voice he started violently.

"Please give me my picture, Mr. Darcy."

"Pray forgive me!" he stammered. "Indeed, Miss Knight, you would not look so angry over the liberty I have taken in looking at your photograph and that of your sister if you knew the deep, the intense interest, I take in you both. Ever since, at Whitlock's office, I overheard you speaking of her illness, I have been filled with a longing to serve you both. A sister's love for a sister has always seemed to me a thing so beautiful in its utter purity and unselfishness, that I was deeply moved by your words on that occasion. You said then that she was very, very ill, and I have hardly dared to ask you whether she is any better yet. Especially amid the vulgar and tarnished surroundings of a theatrical rehearsal I have hesitated to intrude upon a subject so sacred as your home life. But you will tell me now if she is better, will you not?"

Dorothy's back was turned toward him while she busied herself in closing the doors of the portrait frame and replacing it on the mantelshelf, and the Hon. Darcy could scarcely conceal the delighted admiration in his eyes as they traveled over the graceful lines of her waist and shoulders.

"It is very kind of you, I am sure," she said at last, turning toward him, and speaking in rather constrained tones. "I have heard this morning from my sister's nurse, and she is at least no worse."

"She must miss you terribly."

Tears started to Dorothy's eyes. She turned quickly away to hide them, and spoke again in the same reserved tones.

"We have been parted before," she said.

"You must long for the tour to end and set you free."

"No, indeed, I do not," Dorothy was beginning earnestly, but there she checked herself. "When one works for one's living one cannot always choose the locality," she said. "I write to my sister every day."

"And do you tell her about every little incident at rehearsal, about the people you meet in the company, and so on?" he asked, with some curiosity.

"Oh, no! I hardly mention the theatre at all," she replied.

She could not explain to him that she feared lest any allusion to her theatrical surroundings might bring the bitter past all too clearly before her sister's mind.

"Indeed, Mr. Darcy," she added, "I am not so proud of my performance that I should be likely to talk about it. I am afraid that everybody thinks I am dreadful, and I suppose I am."

"You are perfect—quite perfect as Zara!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Entirely my ideal. And I am the author, and I ought to know. I admit to you, Miss Knight, that it was my sympathy with you in your evident distress, and my desire to atone for any wrong or trouble worked against you by my scoundrelly connection, Sergius Trevelyan, that first induced me to engage you for this tour. But your reading of the part of my heroine is so entirely to my liking that I consider your engagement one of the happiest inspirations of my life."

Dorothy flushed with pleasure.

"It is very good of you," she said simply, "especially as I have several times thought I ought to resign the part, as I seem to put everybody out so dreadfully, and seem somehow to be so out of key with the whole thing."

"That is because you are refined and unconventional, as Zara should be. Look at the way in which that Kean from the Surrey side, Ernest Devine, gets what he calls his 'effects'—by unnatural pauses and false emphasis and absurd exaggeration. Nothing could ever induce me to act myself, as I consider it a monkey practice, beneath the attention of men of thought and education. The author is everything, the actor nothing but a living, painted pup-

pet, who as often as not ruins the words by his want of intelligence and stupid conventionality. Don't listen to these people who tell you you are wrong in your rendering, Miss Knight. You are absolutely right, and I am very much obliged to you indeed."

He spoke as if he meant it, and Dorothy was only too glad to believe him. Already she was reproaching herself with having underestimated her manager's magnanimous kindness and chivalry, when it suddenly flashed across her that he had not so far explained the reason of his early call. It was indeed little more than ten o'clock, and the rehearsal was fixed for eleven.

Almost as though he guessed the thought that passed through her mind, Mr. Derrick took his hat and gloves from the table.

"I must not forget the object of my visit," he said. "But first, before I forget it, let me ask you one thing: Are you still as anxious as you were to find out Sergius Trevelyan?"

A deep flush spread all over Dorothy's face, and a vivid excitement flashed into her eyes. With difficulty she restrained the eagerness of her tones as she answered him.

"Yes, Mr. Darcy; I am just as anxious."

"Only to-day," he said, taking a letter from his pocket, "I have had brought to me from my home this communication from a college friend of mine—a very delightful fellow who went the pace a bit, and was sent out on a ranch in Texas. He writes to me from some out-of-the-way hole out West—Carthage, I see it is called," he added, showing Dorothy the heading of the paper, "the Grand Hotel, Carthage—some barn in a swamp, no doubt. Anyhow, he tells me something which may interest you. Listen:

"Last night a theatrical company, passing through on its way back to civilization, played "Madame Angot" here,

and played it very well. We cowboys turned out in force, and were rewarded, for the Clairette was a very handsome woman, with the remains of a good voice and any amount of go. It was Millie Clements, a name pretty well known in the States, and we'd all have thrown our hearts at her feet, but that she traveled with her husband, an awfully good looking English chap, with a lot of curly black hair, who it appears all the girls in the crowd are in love with; Cupid, they call him. He couldn't act a bit, but seemed a decent sort of fellow and well connected, for the odd part of it is he claimed a cousinship with you. I thought it was bluff, but he seemed to know all about you and your family, and even spoke of you as his best friend. His name is Sergius Trevelyan, or at least that is what he calls himself, though he darkly hints he's a duke in disguise. When you write, let me know whether you've ever heard of the fellow.'

"That is all he says on the subject," said Darcy Derrick, glancing through the rest of the letter before putting it back into his pocket, "but, remembering the interest you showed in Trevelyan at Whitlock's office, I thought you might like to hear it."

"I have never seen the man," said Dorothy quickly. "Beyond knowing that he is a cowardly villain, I know nothing about him."

"You speak strongly——"

"I feel strongly. Please, Mr. Darcy, do not speak of the man again."

"I can't bear to think," he said, "that our first acquaintanceship should have been through someone you so evidently, and doubtless for some good reason, dislike and despise, or that you should ever associate me in your mind with this fellow, who for your sake I detest without even knowing why, and who evidently trades on his distant connection with me. If he has, as Whitlock suggested,

cheated your sister out of any money, I do sincerely hope you will relieve my mind by permitting me to make it good to you. I have thought about this ever since I first met you, and I feel that the honor of my family is at stake in the matter."

"Thank you," she said with lowered eyes, blushing painfully. "But my sister and I have no money to be cheated out of by any one."

"I hope with all my soul," Derrick went on after a short pause, speaking low and earnestly, "that the fellow did not pay court to your sister, passing himself off as a single man? I know him to be capable of such conduct from what I have learned since I helped him out of the country. But I do hope that in your sister's case——"

"Have I not asked you," she said, turning upon him proudly, "not to discuss Mr. Trevelyan before me? His name is not fit to be mentioned in the same breath with that of my sister!"

"I beg your pardon! I wish I could make you understand," he added, a little sadly, "how much I want to serve and please you."

His humility touched her, and she turned round upon him with a lovely smile.

"Indeed, you have pleased me very much," she said, "by your most kind encouragement about my attempts at acting. I should never have had the heart, I think, to go through with the engagement but for you."

Darcy's pale face flushed with pleasure.

"Now that you have unbent just for a moment," he said gleefully, with a sort of boyish exuberance, "I can pluck up courage to say what I came for. The fact is, my mother has come down strictly incognito, of course, to see the first night of my play. Naturally, not a soul must know of her presence in the town, on account of my father's recent death. My mother and he were scarcely

on speaking terms from one week's end to another; and for myself, I hadn't seen him for years when he died. But, for all that, an absurd conventionality supposes us to be plunged in woe and crape, and we dare not go counter to it. One owes so much to one's position in society. But my mother adores me, and takes the keenest interest in everything that I undertake; and so, dear soul, she has come to see my play, not one word of which she will understand, but which she will think a masterpiece for the sake of her boy."

"Is she so fond of you, then?" Dorothy asked, looking at him with interest. He had just the sort of good looks, she decided, which would partake of the angelic character in a child. Of course, he was wonderfully good looking, but personally she preferred something more massive and rugged in a man, a red-brown skin instead of that girlish fairness, massive limbs in place of that slender grace, and honest, brown eyes to those languishing blue ones—but here she stopped her thoughts, blushing ere they pictured too clearly the face and figure of her museum acquaintance, Aylmer Read.

"Will you tell me what you were thinking of when you looked at me just now?" Darcy Derrick asked softly, coming a little nearer to her. But Dorothy was not in the least embarrassed, as he rather hoped she would be.

"I must confess that my thoughts were very far away," she answered, smiling indifferently. Just so far as the British Museum is from Hastings, she might have added, but she did not think fit to do so. "You were speaking about your mother?"

Darcy was piqued and disappointed. For more than a week he had seen the girl, with whom he had fallen passionately in love at first sight, during several hours daily; yet her gray eyes could meet his love-sick glances unflinchingly, and no trace of a blush passed over her clear,

pale, pink skin as he greeted her. Darcy was of an impatient nature, and felt that some decisive action was needed.

"It is on my mother's behalf that I have called this morning," he said. "Of course, I have talked to her about you, and she is very anxious to know you."

"Really?" put in Dorothy as he paused, in quite unaffected surprise.

He looked at her and decided that she must be acting. She must know, as everybody did, that he was Lord Derrick's second son, and that his elder brother, the present wearer of the title, was an invalid and a bachelor. She must also have learned, from Mrs. Stourton-Chepe or from other members of the company, that he had come into a good deal of money at his father's death. Personally, too, she must realize that he was not quite a Caliban, and, taking all these things together, her attitude of calmly ignoring his evident admiration must assuredly be assumed.

So he reasoned, as even a less vain man might have done under the circumstances, without taking count of the fact that Dorothy was wrapped up in her sister, for whose cruel fate she was inclined to abjure the entire male sex, and that she was furthermore honestly absorbed in the uncongenial task of trying to be worth ten pounds a week as an actress. Moreover, the Hon. Darcy Derrick's personality in no way appealed to her particular taste. She had but recently known a man who resembled her ideal far more closely than the Hon. Darcy could ever do, and whether the latter admired her or not was a subject to which she had given very little attention.

She listened, therefore, in surprise while her manager proceeded to beg her to come and lunch that afternoon with his mother and himself at the hotel where Lady Derrick was staying until the production of the play.

"Mrs. Stourton-Chepe will bring you," he said. "She and my mother have met in society some years ago, before poor Chepe got sold up and had to go on the stage. Now, you will come, will you not, Miss Knight? My mother takes the deepest interest in what I have told her of you and your sister, and she is extremely anxious to make your acquaintance."

"You are very kind," Dorothy returned in rather reserved tones, "but really, you know so very little of me or of my sister either——"

"Oh, but I have heard from other people of your devotion to each other," he assured her warmly. "And I think it most touching and beautiful. Years ago my mother lost a sister whom she loved very dearly, and she can sympathize with you."

Had he heard any of the true facts of the case, she wondered. But his face expressed nothing but a tender and respectful admiration, and she was constrained, somewhat against her will, to accept his invitation.

"You must forgive the short notice," he said. "My mother's arrival was altogether unexpected. I believe she came, prompted by something I said in one of my letters recently—something about you," he added.

Dorothy looked across the table at him, clearly startled. But before she had time to speak again he had caught up his hat, and excusing himself on the plea that he should have just sufficient time to acquaint his mother with her acceptance of the invitation to lunch, he had thanked her, and bowed himself out.

Dorothy was surprised to note the high value Mrs. Stourton-Chepe placed upon this casual invitation. The latter lady came down to rehearsal rustling in a new silk gown, and grew quite effusive to Miss Knight over "dear Lady Derrick's kindness."

"Do you know," she said, "that there are dozens of

girls in London who would give a very great deal to be in your shoes?"

"Why should they?"

"Well, some girls would be a little bit pleased if one of the handsomest men in London, with only a dying man between him and the title, and belonging to one of the oldest families in Ireland, was to fall victim to their charms."

"Would they?" asked Dorothy. "Not if they had other and more important things to think about."

"Isn't he good enough for you?" asked Mrs. Stourton-Chepe satirically. "Or are you perhaps waiting for a prince of the blood?"

But Dorothy only laughed, and she might have attached but little value to Mrs. Stourton-Chepe's sarcasms, but for the fact, which was made patent to both ladies as soon as they were shown into the presence of Lady Derrick at the Prince's Hotel, that the Hon. Darcy had most certainly confided to his mother his passion for his leading lady.

"I was sure from what Darcy told me that you must be very beautiful," Lady Derrick exclaimed, taking Dorothy's two hands in hers and gazing at her earnestly. "But I never guessed that you would be as beautiful as this. May I kiss you, my dear child?"

CHAPTER XIII.

DARCY'S MOTHER.

Lady Derrick was a woman of about sixty years of age, who in early youth had been renowned for beauty of a characteristic Southern type, an olive-complexioned, oval-faced Madonna, with liquid, black-fringed eyes and a lithe, slender figure.

During more than forty years of married life her husband had spoiled her, and she had accepted his devotion with languid grace, neglecting him and her other children in order to lavish an unreasoning love upon her second son, Darcy.

Darcy's good looks and gentle ways, Darcy's literary and poetic gifts, his charming good humor and love of feminine society, his horror of violence and vulgarity and the deferential tenderness of his manner toward his mother, delighted her, and were in striking contrast to the peevish irritability of her sickly first-born and the unsympathetic tastes of her four other noisy fox-hunting sons and daughters.

Darcy was not like a Derrick at all; that was, no doubt, why his father and his brothers and sisters failed to appreciate him—they were envious of his beauty, his genius, and his extreme popularity among women. So, at least, his mother decided, and with the peculiar obstinacy of certain very gentle-mannered women she had upheld her favorite son in all his quarrels with his father and supplied him with money until her private allowance was practically exhausted.

To Dorothy, who had known but little of a mother's love, it was deeply touching to note the persistency with which Lady Derrick's eyes dwelt upon the face of her darling son, whose every movement she watched with lingering tenderness. The whilom beauty had grown fat and shapeless in figure, and her once clear olive tints were now unmistakably sallow; yet as her large, dark eyes lit with a very passion of maternal love when they rested on her son, it seemed to Dorothy that never in Lady Derrick's early bloom could they have appeared more beautiful.

Her own position she felt to be sufficiently embarrassing. After lunch Lady Derrick left her son to entertain Mrs. Stourton-Chepe, while she drew Dorothy into the embrasure of a window overlooking the sea and retailed to her numberless anecdotes of her beloved Darcy's infancy and early childhood.

"I tell you these things because they interest the women who love him," she said with a gracious smile. "My poor boy has been grievously misunderstood at home; he and I have been kept apart, and away from my influence, with his romantic and affectionate nature, I have been constantly anxious about his future. So you will easily understand my anxiety when his letters became filled with praises of a beautiful young lady whom he declared he loved as he had never loved before."

"Yes," put in Dorothy, feeling extremely uncomfortable, as Lady Derrick paused and looked at her archly.

"And I said to myself: 'Here is my dear boy, only just restored to his home, his country and his mother, under the influence of some unknown lady—a professional actress!' You must pardon me, my dear child, for telling you just the true ideas that came into my mind. Many actresses are honorable and well-bred women, but naturally I thought my son, who has only to be seen to be

loved by women of all classes, might have looked higher and chosen either an heiress or some lady in his own rank of life. But when I saw you——”

“Me, Lady Derrick, when you saw me?”

“I realized,” pursued the widow calmly, “that you are beautiful enough to excuse any young man’s folly, and that you are a lady and have a face full of nobility and goodness. And I thanked God that my boy had fallen into such good hands.”

“Indeed, Lady Derrick,” cried Dorothy, “you are making a great mistake, and you have been troubling yourself without cause. Your son is nothing more to me than a kind and courteous manager, and I am nothing more to him than the actress who will play the chief part in his piece.”

“You need not fear any opposition from me,” Lady Derrick said, evidently unconvinced by Dorothy’s outburst. “I have always expected that Darcy would be uninfluenced by worldly considerations in his choice of a wife. And I shall be so happy to know that he is safely married to a woman who loves him and who is worthy of him.”

“I sincerely hope you will, Lady Derrick,” burst from Miss Knight, “but it will never be to me!”

“You know that my son loves you?”

“Indeed, I do not! He has never hinted at such a thing. Had he attempted to do so, forgive me for saying so, but I certainly should not have allowed him to proceed.”

Lady Derrick drew back in her seat and gazed at the young girl with cold suspicion.

“Have you some other attachment, or—entanglement?” she asked pointedly.

“I cannot see that that has anything to do with it,”

answered Dorothy, blushing hotly. "But, as a matter of fact, I am not at all in love with any one."

"Not with my son?"

Lady Derrick's tone was one of incredulous amazement.

"Not in the least with your son. Nor is he with me, I should say. I am sorry you should have misunderstood the position of affairs, Lady Derrick, and I hope I have said nothing to pain you. But your son is perfectly heart-whole so far as I know."

This was perhaps not absolutely veracious on the part of Miss Knight. But the note of patronage in Lady Derrick's tone had incensed her. In the rather awkward pause that followed her statement, Lady Derrick decided that this girl must certainly be either exceptionally cold-hearted or surprisingly untruthful. In any case, of course her aim was to entrap the Hon. Darcy into a marriage which, under certain existing circumstances, might not be wholly a misfortune. With Darcy's impressionable, head-strong nature and the memory of other escapades of his on her mind, Lady Derrick would have been disposed to welcome this lovely nobody as a daughter-in-law with condescending affectionateness, if not with effusion. With his temperament, dear Darcy might have chosen so much more unwisely. But Dorothy's cold attitude toward this irresistible wooer disgusted his mother, and she was not slow to communicate her sentiments to her son as soon as the pair were left alone together.

"Isn't she exquisite? Isn't she Phidias' Diana flushed into life? Tell me, truthfully, mother, did you ever see a more exquisite skin? It's like the first flush of sunrise on snow. And her eyes, 'the grayest of things blue, the greenest of things gray,' her wonderful, searching, shining eyes! They draw a man's soul out. Tell me now, what do you think of her? With the exception of your-

self, she is the most beautiful creature ever born into this world. What do you think of her?"

"She is very handsome," his mother owned; "but I find her cold and hard. Why, my dearest boy, she says—and she told me this, mind, told it to me, your mother—that she cares nothing for you at all, and has no reason to believe you are fond of her."

The Hon. Darcy smiled and appeared not in the least discouraged.

"She will love me, though," he said, half to himself. "I shall teach her, and the teaching will be divine. Which is more exciting sport—the game that flies or the game that comes to meet you? I love her and she must and shall love me."

But when on the following day he met Miss Knight at the last rehearsal, he made no allusion to what had passed between her and his mother, of whom, however, he spoke with warm affection.

"Her love for me is amazing," he declared. "She lives only for me. A mother's love is the most sacred and beautiful thing in the world, almost the only thing which survives through good report and evil report to the very gates of death."

His eyes were fixed upon the darkened "flies" of the theatre above his head, and Dorothy could see that tears glistened in them.

"I hope Lady Derrick will enjoy the play to-morrow," she said, after a long pause, feeling it incumbent upon her to make some sort of remark.

"Oh, I have a piece of excellent news about that," Darcy exclaimed, coming down to earth again. "Graham North and his wife are staying in Hastings for a few days and I'm going to have him in to-morrow night."

"Who is Graham North?"

"Is it possible you have never heard of the critic of the

Daily Leader? He has but little of the highest artistic faculty, but he possesses a good honest tradesman's instinct of what pays in the long run, which is as much as a nation of shopkeepers requires from their favorite dramatic critic. He can practically make or mar a play or an actor. It will be everything to have 'Love's Right' criticised in the Leader by Graham North as a send-off."

"But I thought you despised critics?"

"I do, personally, but the paying public doesn't. And I regret to say that North can make or mar an author, too."

The redoubtable North was introduced to Miss Knight on the stage a little later, and roared as gently as any sucking-dove. A short, well-built man, with charming manners, and thoughtful, humorous eyes behind pincenez. He talked for a considerable time to "Mr. Darcy's" beautiful leading lady, to the evident envy of the rest of the company, and looked at her persistently with unconcealed admiration.

"And what do you think of my leading lady?" Mr. Darcy inquired, as he and Mr. Graham North, Wyverly and Coles left the cool, dark theatre for the blazing sunshine outside.

"My dear Derrick, I don't know where you discovered her, but she is one of the most absolutely lovely women I have ever had the good fortune to behold. There is an intense womanliness about her which appeals to all that is best in a man. Upon my word I could watch her face and listen to her voice all day, and imagine myself in a poet's Heaven! The man who wins such a woman's love will be a lucky fellow."

"Yes, but how about the man who engages her to play 'lead'?" inquired Wyverly drily.

"Ah, that remains to be seen," observed the great critic diplomatically. "I am speaking of Miss Knight as a

woman. I have yet to make her acquaintance as an actress."

The first night arrived at length, a night of moist, melting heat. The paint and powder rolled in pellets off the faces of the actors cooped up in the gas-laden space of their stifling dressing-rooms and became caked in raised white lines upon their upper lips. Dorothy had no notion how to "make up," and on a first night every one was too much excited to instruct her in the art. Fortunately her skill as a painter taught her to avoid any of the startling mistakes of beginners in that direction, and she contented herself with slightly smudging the neighborhood of her beautiful eyes and disfiguring her complexion by a very little crude red and white color. Extreme nervousness numbed her faculties and made her appear apathetic and mechanical. Unused as she was to the theatre, it yet appeared to her somewhat ominous that the audience never applauded anything that she said or did, and the farther she proceeded with her part the more keenly did she realize its many absurdities. "Old Marmalade" gave out his lines with as great a display of rollicking unction as though they were penned by the greatest humorist of the age. The Devines, the Grahams, and even the Stourton-Chepes and Jack Wyverly threw themselves into their parts with unquestioning thoroughness, and reaped their reward in the attention and occasional applause of the hot and scanty audience. They were actors—"theirs not to reason why; theirs but to act or die"—but beautiful "Zara Carewe," of the graceful movements and melodious voice, caught herself thinking again and again that the whole thing was an unreal and distasteful business, that her words were ungrammatical nonsense, and that only her dear Phyllis' necessities justified her in attempting anything for which she so clearly felt herself unsuited.

At the end of the play there was a half-hearted call for

the author from some of his friends in front, but before the Hon. Darcy had time to take or refuse it, the wearied audience had gladly made their way into the purer air outside the theatre, and every one knew that "Love's Right" had, in the technical language of Mr. Ernest Devine, "scored a frost."

Any doubts that might have remained on the subject were dispelled by Mr. Graham North's verdict in the London Daily Leader, copies of which were eagerly bought by the entire company.

"Mr. Darcy," wrote the eminent critic, "whose curious play, entitled 'Love's Right,' has just been produced at Hastings on a trial trip before it is presented to London audiences, has much to learn as a dramatist, but he has even more to learn as a manager. Allowing for occasional lapses into mere bombastical verbiage, and for the strangely low, or we should rather say perverted, code of morals which he expounds, the romance of his conception and the occasional flashes of real wit and humor in his dialogue would lead one to hope that with further experience he may yet write a strong and interesting drama. But the best dramatist the world has yet produced could not afford to entrust the chief burden of his work to a totally inexperienced and incompetent performer. The lady to whom the strongly emotional and difficult part of 'Zara Carewe,' in 'Love's Right,' has been entrusted, has, we have no hesitation in saying, entirely mistaken her vocation. It were kinder to Miss Dorothy Knight to urge upon her to quit at once a career for which in every respect save that of personal comeliness, she is obviously unfitted. Grace of movement, beauty, and refinement do not atone for a total lack of all dramatic instinct, a wooden and mechanical method, a parrot-like delivery, and a listless indifference to the exigencies of the scene, varied only by an awkward self-consciousness at those very moments when

a true actress would have been borne along by the passion of the scene. Let the part of 'Zara' be entrusted at once to an actress of even mediocre ability, and we may be able to judge more favorably of the play and of the part; in the hands of its present exponent it is frankly ridiculous."

CHAPTER XIV.

PASSION AND POETRY.

The Hastings papers were not slow in following London's lead.

Dorothy bought them all as they came out and scanned them eagerly to see if any one of them offered her the slightest encouragement. But, while condemning the play as tedious and lacking action, one and all attributed its signal failure chiefly to the incompetence of Mr. Darcy's leading lady, and little as she liked her new profession, Dorothy could not help feeling deeply humiliated and disappointed, and none the less so because the other members of the company scarcely attempted, even in her presence, to veil their triumphant amusement at the turn things had taken.

"Serves her right; coming here with her airs and graces and a dressing-room to herself just because the manager is fool enough to be in love with her. It's these impertinent amateurs who crowd the stage and prevent sound and experienced artists from earning a living."

Such was the opinion of at least four members of the company on Miss Knight's fiasco. The Stourton-Chepes, Jack Wyverly and Coles were more amused than anything. It was just like Darcy, they said, to engage a novice because she had a pretty face. She would teach him an expensive lesson, which he much needed. Only Marmaduke Strutt was sorry for Dorothy when he noted, through all her proud and determined efforts at self-control, the redness of her eyelids and the pallor of her cheeks.

As to the Hon. Darcy, he bore his failure in sufficiently light-hearted fashion, and stoutly declared that the critics were all wrong.

"There's no rant and fustian in my play; it soars beyond the money-grubbing common-places of their dreary everyday business; that's why they condemn it," he said.

He was really considerably disappointed in that his work had completely failed to shock those who had seen it, and had only succeeded in boring them.

"Dorothy Knight is perfect," he maintained; "a poem in motion. Her very ignorance of acting constitutes her greatest charm. Everything she does is so simple and natural."

He sat in front every night in different parts of the almost empty houses, leaning back in his seat and gazing steadfastly upon his leading lady. Every night he sent fresh bouquets to her dressing-room, always without a name, so that Dorothy could keep the flowers with a light conscience. And Dorothy, who loved flowers, filled her shabby lodgings with them, and wished they would stand the railway journey to London just as they were, and picked out the best to pack in cardboard-boxes and send them to her sister lying ill in Lockhart Cottages.

"I am getting on capitally, darling," she wrote. "Flowers every night. Nurse tells me the roses arrived quite fresh. To-morrow I will send you some more."

Meantime she was very far from hopeful. Brighton confirmed the verdict of Hastings, and the chief paper there went so far as to refrain from criticising her performance, as "the subject was too painful." Under these depressing circumstances, and the fact that she knew the entire company were laughing at her, Dorothy acted, if possible, worse than ever. Then a London evening paper began to circulate in the theatre, in which a long and highly laudatory notice of "Love's Right" appeared, spe-

cially singling out for praise Miss Dorothy Knight's performance of "Zara."

"All that this beautiful girl does," so ran the notice, "is simple, refined and wholly admirable."

The Hon. Darcy himself brought the paper round to Dorothy's lodgings, and read aloud to her the article in question.

"I knew the critics would come round in time," he said. "This man exactly expresses my own views on the matter."

"I am afraid I am dreadfully bad all the same," said Dorothy humbly. "Everybody says I have spoiled your play, and it is really very good of you to refuse to believe it."

The Hon. Darcy put the paper down and began to shake all over.

"Do you think I would care," he whispered, "if even it were true, and you had spoiled it? Do you think I would mind if you ruined me, reduced me to beggary, if only you gave me sometimes one kind glance from those lovely eyes, or let me hold that beautiful, soft, strong hand of yours in mine? What is my money to me? Do you think I wouldn't be penniless to-morrow if you would love me?"

There was no doubt of the strength of his emotion. He was deadly pale, and his voice was tremulous, his eyes alight with passion. His long, pointed, white hands twitched as they hung at his sides, opening and closing nervously as though they longed to seize her in their grasp. But although this display of scarce-repressed passion stirred and excited Dorothy, who in her life had seen very little of love-making, it was by no means in his favor that she was moved.

"If you talk in that style to me, Mr. Darcy, you will make it extremely difficult for me to stay in the company," she said coldly, "and I shall certainly avoid seeing you at

all. Already I know everybody thinks I ought to have given up the part when the critics said I spoiled the play, and I would have done so but that I wanted the money so badly. But if you behave in this way I shall have to go."

Darcy sank into an arm-chair, limp and nerveless. For some seconds he remained silent, staring at her and gnawing his red under-lip. Something about her icy purity, her unconsciousness of and indifference to passion in spite of the soft feminine allurements of her appearance, exercised an extraordinary fascination over him. There she stood within a few yards of him, an apparently defenseless girl, yet so walled round by quiet dignity that the mere vulgar methods of love-making were not to be thought of where she was concerned.

"Forgive me for offending you," he said at last, speaking in very low and subdued tones. "I would not willingly hurt you for the world. And I cannot quite understand why you should consider the declaration of my love as an insult."

"I did not say it was an insult, Mr. Darcy. It is merely something I don't want to hear."

"Ah! How can you be so cold, so cruel!" he cried, springing from his seat, and smiting his hands violently against each other in his excitement. "Have you no pity, no mercy? Can't you see I would give my life and soul for you? Is the whole love of a man's heart nothing to you, less than nothing, that you should treat me with such disdain? Am I hideous or crippled that you should turn from me with loathing and contempt? Dorothy, turn your sweet eyes on me for a moment, and say that you pity me!"

"I am sorry, very sorry," she faltered, withdrawing toward the door, "that you should waste so much affection upon me. But as I cannot in any way return it, or, in-

deed, feel anything at all about you, I do hope you will now forget this fancy for me."

"Never!" he exclaimed. "It is part of my life. You are the woman in the world created for me to love. I cannot live without you."

"Please, please," she cried, "do not make it impossible for me to keep this engagement! Please go now at once, and let me forget everything you have said."

"You must not forget! Dorothy, is it possible that you, with the heart of a woman in your sweet breast, can see a man suffer as your coldness makes me suffer, and feel nothing in return?"

As he spoke he suddenly caught her hands in a fevered clasp and tried to draw her to him. But in an instant Dorothy's gentleness and reserve vanished, and she turned upon him with flashing eyes at a white heat of anger that would not have disgraced a queen of tragedy.

"Let go my hands this instant!" she said in a low, concentrated tone of intense anger. "I said just now that I felt nothing about you. But when you touch me like this against my will, I feel that I hate you!"

He released his hold in an instant. There was no mistaking the expression of absolute detestation which had shone from her eyes.

The Hon. Darcy muttered something highly uncomplimentary to women in general as the door closed upon his irate leading lady, who clearly was no more impressed by his fervid love than she was by his position, prospects or good looks. He had never met a woman so obdurate, nor one who excited within him so ardent a longing. Yet he was not wholly discouraged by his interview. The hate which flashed into her eyes was far, far better than indifference; at least it was a passion with excitement and heat about it, and as such he esteemed it less unflattering than her former calm.

"She shall love me," he said to himself as he left the house. "She shall quiver with delight at my touch; she shall listen and wait for my voice; she shall feel my coming before I appear. A woman who can hate can also love."

But when he met her again on the platform during the course of the Sunday migration of the company to Eastbourne, his manner was very humble and gentle, and he contrived to ask for forgiveness for having "lost his head a little" at their last interview.

"I am sure you would forgive me," he murmured, "if you knew how bitterly I have reproached myself."

"Please say no more about it," Miss Knight said gravely, but with a modicum of graciousness.

Since that little scene at her lodgings in Brighton Dorothy had learned from Mrs. Stouton-Chepe that the laudatory notice about her performance as Zara Carewe in a London evening paper had been written by no less a person than the Hon. Darcy himself.

"Could you not recognize his style?" Mrs. Stourton-Chepe had inquired somewhat contemptuously. "We, all in the company, knew it in a moment. He has been trying to bribe the local critics to speak well of you by champagne suppers; but frankly, my dear, they dare not praise you. I am sure you will not mind my saying that you had better distrust the genuineness of all favorable notices you may receive. Darcy Derrick is doing his utmost to push you to the front, but, my dear Miss Knight, you have mistaken your vocation, and I don't think it's in the slightest degree probable that you will ever get another engagement worth taking. The agent, Whitlock, was in front at Brighton, and he said to me—but perhaps you would rather not hear?"

"Please go on. It can't be worse than what I have heard already."

"Oh, it was nothing very unkind. Only that he was very glad for your sake that you had an engagement for life offered you by the Hon. Mr. Derrick, as you would not be able to secure another on the stage."

"It was most impertinent of him!" exclaimed Miss Knight, flushing with anger. "What right had he to make such a statement—the first part, I mean?"

"Oh, our handsome manager makes no secret of his adoration for you. And I really fail to see what there is about it to make you angry."

Mrs. Stourton-Chepe was beginning to feel somewhat exasperated by Dorothy's continued indifference to the splendid chance offered to her. It was true that the elder lady knew but little of the Hon. Darcy Derrick, and that that little included several discreditable stories connecting his name with various women. But what of that? A girl in Dorothy's position could not afford to be too particular. Darcy had come into twenty-five thousand pounds on his father's death, which the latter had been unable to will away from him; if Dorothy married him at once like a sensible girl she might at least assist him in the spending of it, or, better still, she might insist, while he was yet in the first flush of passion, that he should settle a nice little yearly allowance strictly upon her. She would then be the Hon. Mrs. Derrick, sister-in-law of Lord Derrick, and daughter-in-law to a lady who numbered an Italian princess among her near relatives.

Disquieting news from home reached Dorothy during the latter part of the week at Brighton. Phyllis, or "Mrs. Trevelyan" as the nurse called her in her letters, was certainly worse, delirious often, and suffering torments from headache and neuralgia. Nurse Rose wrote full accounts of her patient daily, and was evidently most assiduous in her care. She had indeed been surprised at the willingness with which her ordinary fee of two guineas

had been agreed upon, and the regularity with which it was remitted to her weekly by a young lady coming from a poor little place like Lockhart Cottages. This fee did not include the nurse's food, "the best of everything," as Cresswell wrote grudgingly, "and quite a fine lady she is, too, for the waiting on she wants. Still, I suppose she knows her work, and she do take care of poor Miss Phyllis."

Every Saturday evening, upon receiving her salary, Dorothy hurried to the postoffice and forwarded five pounds to Cresswell. Her own expenses she cut down to the smallest possible sum, but, alas, guard every shilling as she would, she found to her dismay that, living as she did alone, the rent of her rooms, the extra charges made by grasping landladies, the necessary tips at the theatre, and unavoidable small expenses, seldom amounted each week to less than thirty-five shillings.

And then there were her stage dresses, three in number, the feather fan, and long evening gloves, stipulated for by the manager, and the shoes to match her gown. A cheap and clever little dressmaker had made her dresses on credit, but Dorothy knew her to be a poor and hard-working little woman, and every week she forwarded to her a portion of the eight pound fifteen shillings arranged for as the price of her simple costumes. Whitlock, the agent, had promised that his client, Mr. Darcy, would "meet her in the matter of the price of her dresses," and the latter had readily promised to do so. But by this time he had either forgotten his promise or was waiting for Miss Knight to refer to it, a thing which she could not bring herself to do.

The third week of the tour, therefore, found Dorothy hard at work again with pencil and paint brush, executing flower and figure designs on the chance of selling them, rising very early to take a little much-needed exercise, and

remaining all day penned up within her small, cheerless lodgings, bending over her painting, while the other members of the company enjoyed themselves on the pier, sands and sea.

Now and then, as she raised her aching head, saw the bright sunshine flooding the streets outside, and heard the song of the birds and the laughter of passing merry-makers, a little bitterness would creep into her heart. She was only twenty, and, in spite of a life of fatigue and an anchorite's diet, the young blood in her veins sometimes leaped and sprang with longing for a little gaiety, a little sunshine, a little love.

Then she would seize her brush in a fit of remorse at her own selfishness. What were her trifling disappointments and worries compared with her sister's ruined life and broken heart?

At the end of the third week a letter came from Nurse Rose that filled her with the deepest anxiety.

"Mrs. Trevelyan is still alive," wrote the nurse, "and with the greatest care she may yet be saved. Pray don't think of coming to see her at present. I will telegraph should she take a turn for the worse. Above everything, Mrs. Trevelyan must be kept perfectly quiet. The doctor will not allow Mrs. Cresswell to enter the room, as she has a habit of sobbing, which might disturb the patient. You may rely on me to do all that can be done. Should all go well, I hope to send for you in about a week's time."

CHAPTER XV.

HOME AGAIN.

About ten days later Dorothy paid a flying visit to London, and found the great city hot, dusty, and tired after a season of sunshine, brown leaves ready to drop off blackened trees, rich Londoners intent upon their autumn plans for fresh dissipation and enjoyment, and improvident poor Londoners looking gleefully forward to their annual week of high-priced comfort at the seaside.

Lockhart Cottages looked smaller and meaner than ever as Dorothy Knight approached them. The corner house was awaiting the process of "selling up," and bills announcing the fact were posted over the side wall and front gates of the little dwelling. As usual, there were a dozen or more little children in dirty pinafores playing, screaming and fighting in the broken piece of road before the houses. On the other side of the way the sweep's good lady was gossiping with her next door neighbor, who took in mangling, while at the entrance to the adjoining mews which was the lair of a private omnibus, the driver and conductor stood beside the vehicle in conversation with some horsey friends discussing the odds on a forthcoming race.

It was all very sordid and very mean seen through clouds of dust under the glaring sunlight. Living in them, with her mind constantly absorbed in other things, Dorothy had grown to lose sight of her ugly and depressing surroundings. But now, coming back to them after five weeks' absence, she felt her heart sink within her at

the thought that she and Phyllis should be doomed to live in such environment.

"If even," the thought flashed upon her as she passed before her own gate, "if even I am able to keep this roof over our heads."

In her absence the little garden had been neglected, and already the grass had made incursions into the paths and the daisies and forget-me-nots drooped, dead or dying, for want of water. Dorothy sighed as she put her latchkey in the door. Cresswell was the soul of unselfish faithfulness, but she possessed neither method nor memory, and having spent her entire life until the past three years as one of the many servants in a large and extravagantly kept establishment, she could do nothing without orders, and money seemed to melt through her fingers.

The slight noise of Miss Knight's entrance attracted the attention of the old servant who was anxiously awaiting her young mistress' return. She came now from the kitchen to greet her and wept copiously as Dorothy kissed her and asked for news of her sister.

"She's very poorly, miss, and that changed you'd hardly know her. But it's no use asking me, miss, how she is, as I hardly ever have as much as a glimpse of her. And it does seem hard, after all these years, that me, who has known Miss Phyllis and you since you was babies, must be turned out of the room by this fine lady nurse, and sent to fetch her beer and cook her chops and steaks instead. And it's no good my speaking to Dr. Morgan, for he takes her part. 'Obey Nurse Rose's orders in everything,' he says. But I says only my young mistress can give me orders, and it hurts me, Miss Dorothy, that it does."

Miss Knight soothed the old servant as best she could and made her way to her sister's room. Nurse Rose had written that Phyllis was asking constantly for her in her

conscious and semi-conscious intervals, so although but twelve days more would see the conclusion of the tour and disbanding of the company, Dorothy seized the chance of a cheap and early excursion from Bournemouth to London to catch a glimpse at her beloved Phyllis.

Outside the sick room Nurse Rose stopped her.

"Your sister is terribly weak," she whispered, "and her heart's action is so feeble that anything in the nature of a shock must be avoided. I have been preparing her gently for your visit during the past hour and she is quiet now. She is quite conscious to-day and recognized your foot-step. Try not to show surprise at her altered appearance."

Dorothy bent her head and stole into the room. The green blind was half lowered to protect the invalid's eyes from the sun and its shade accentuated the unearthly pallor of Phyllis' face. Her small, pale mouth seemed absolutely large, so sunken were her cheeks, and her gray eyes appeared of an unnatural size and brilliancy. Round her waxen-white forehead short rings of dark-brown hair, cut close as a boy's added yet another unfamiliar note to her appearance. Her plentiful, soft hair which for stage effect she had dyed a pale gold color, had been cut off during her illness, and, womanlike, this was her first thought after Dorothy had stepped gently to her bedside and folded her in her arms.

"Oh, my dear, dear Dolly," she whispered feebly. "How beautiful to have you here again. Do I look very dreadful without my hair? It made me so hot I was glad to get rid of it. And it will never matter how I look again now."

"Hush, my dear one. You don't know what you are saying."

"Yes, I do. Is nurse out of the room?"

"Yes, Phyllis, dear, don't try to talk."

"Let me, before my thoughts go wandering off again. Dorothy, they think they will save me, but I know that I cannot live very long. Already things seem to be getting a long way off—even you don't seem really near me—your voice seems to come from a distance. I feel as if I had grown into a shadow already. I have never thought very much about religion, Dolly, not to worry about it, I mean."

"Phyllis!"

"Dolly, dear, you are not to cry. Death can't possibly be worse than life. You don't know how I have prayed for death when those dreadful pains in my head come on. I've made such a muddle of it all. Only when you told me about the sea in your letters I sometimes wanted to get well to see it again."

"You can't think how lovely it looked this morning," said Dorothy, anxious beyond everything to change the current of her sister's thoughts. "So blue and brilliant it made one's eyes ache to look at it. Last night I had a walk along the cliffs after the performance. The sky was almost as bright and clear as at midday, and to see the little waves breaking in silver under the moonlight was delightful."

"I should like to see the sea again," sighed Phyllis, a wistful look coming into her great eyes. "I almost think I should get better if I could see the sea."

"You shall see it, dear, if you want to!" cried Dorothy impetuously. "You shall have anything you want if you will only get well!"

Phyllis nestled her cheek against her sister's hand and kissed it.

"I feel better already, now that you are back," murmured she. "I think if I could lie still day after day, with you beside me, looking out at the sea—or on a ship, Dolly—wouldn't that be lovely? A ship that would sail away

with us somewhere where there are no more pains and worries and broken hearts—I should get well then, quite well.”

Her head drooped heavily upon Dorothy’s arm as she finished speaking, and her eyes closed. She had fallen asleep, worn out by the excitement of this meeting. Gently disengaging her arms, Dorothy laid her sister back upon her pillows, and went in search of Nurse Rose.

“The worst thing about Mrs. Trevelyan’s case is that she doesn’t seem to want to live,” the nurse said. “Of course, being so very young is very much in her favor, though, poor, dear thing, she might be thirty from her looks now. Yet Mrs. Cresswell tells me that you and your sister were formerly so much alike it was difficult to tell one from the other.”

Dr. Morgan arrived on his daily visit at this juncture. The patient was going on as well as could be expected, he said.

“I am very much afraid though, that even if we pull her through this, she will never be a strong woman again,” he said. “Unfortunately, I can do but little to alleviate the acute neuralgia from which she suffers, owing to the enfeebled condition of her heart. What your sister really requires is change of air and of scene. Of course, I don’t want to prescribe anything impossible, but if you could get your sister to some warm seaside place when she is a little stronger.”

“Such as Plymouth?”

“Yes, Plymouth would be an excellent place for her in about a fortnight’s time, always supposing that she is strong enough to be moved.”

“I shall be at Torquay next week,” said Dorothy.

“Next week might be rather premature. But a few days later——”

“You think it would save her life?”

"It would certainly be conducive to her recovery. It is not only her body but her mind that is in need of physic. I have seldom seen a woman more utterly hopeless. May I ask if you have had any news of her husband?"

"Yes," she answered fiercely; "I have had news of him. He is in America traveling about and enjoying himself, while my poor darling is lying there more dead than alive through his callous wickedness. Oh, what nonsense it is to talk about the rights of women and any possible equality between women and men, while Nature herself is so cruelly unjust and unfair! For the man, all the pleasure in life; for the woman, all the pains and punishment!"

"You are arguing from an altogether exceptional case," observed Dr. Morgan gently. "In a right and natural order of things it is the man who bears the buffeting and the anxieties out in the world, while the woman remains sheltered in the home that he has provided for her. You must not let your sister's sad experiences make you bitter. Women are not all angels any more than men are all devils, believe me."

"I dare say not," she returned. "But, Dr. Morgan, all those set phrases about the male bird fighting for food while the female bird stays warm in the nest don't apply to us women who have to work and work harder than men, competing with them at a disadvantage."

"It is a state of affairs which is not right," he said. "Woman's place is the home, and she is happiest there."

"But woman's place will have to be wherever she can make a living, while England remains overstocked with women, and while English parents are too selfish to borrow a hint from France and save up dots for their daughters."

He laid his hand kindly on her shoulder.

"You are too young to argue," he said, "and too pretty.

Why don't you marry, and get some nice man to provide you with a comfortable home for yourself, and for your sister, too? It is the happiest life you will find."

"I have found very little happiness in the other," she said, smiling, but with tears in her eyes. "But these good men who are anxious to lay their fortunes at the feet of a penniless girl, and provide for her relations also, don't grow on every hedge."

As she spoke she suddenly blushed. Was not one man at least willing, nay, eager, to give her his name and his fortune, and might he not easily be induced to provide for her sister also?

The doctor noted her change of countenance, and laughed softly to himself, drawing his own conclusions from it.

"The fault of pretty girls," he said sagely, "is that they are too particular. That is why the plain ones get married first."

"You talk," exclaimed Dorothy indignantly, "and all men talk, as if getting married was the one end and aim in every woman's life, the only thing she was created for, the only thing she ever thinks about. But you are quite wrong."

"I and the other men are right in so many cases that we may well be wrong in exceptional ones," he said. "Don't be too hard on the young man. Beauty soon fades, and lovely women are apt to grow bitter. Good-by, Miss Knight; you may be sure I will take every care of your sister until your return; and, by the way," he added, stopping in the hall as Dorothy was accompanying him to the front door, "how are you getting on in your theatrical career?"

"Hush!" whispered Dorothy, putting her finger to her lips, "I wouldn't for the world that Phyllis should know,

or Cresswell, who might tell her. But I am a failure altogether. I cannot act a bit, and I fear I never shall."

Again the doctor laughed softly to himself.

"You are the first young lady I have ever met who did not think herself an embryo Siddons," he said. "But if you really are a failure, there is all the more reason why you should not be hard upon that young man you thought of just now—the one who is ready to offer you a nice home. Good-by, Miss Knight!"

Throughout the hot and dusty journey back to Bournemouth in a third-class compartment full of workmen, women and babies, Dorothy sat with set face and half-closed eyes, trying to think out the problem of the future.

Poor Cresswell had been deeply hurt by the mere suggestion that she could have saved anything out of the five pounds a week Dorothy had sent her. The nurse's fee, the rent, and charges for medicines made it a hard enough matter to manage on the sum, she declared, and Dorothy knew that it was useless to argue with her. When the agent and the dressmaker were paid off at the end of the tour Dorothy foresaw that barely a few shillings would remain of that sixty pounds from which she had hoped so much. She dared not think of the doctor's bill, and her heart sank as she realized how improbable it was that she would obtain another theatrical engagement, or that she would be able to meet her heavy expenses by the exercise of her talent for drawing and painting.

She felt weak and tired. She had not realized how much late hours and early rising, working morning, noon and night, and persistent semi-starvation had weakened her. A healthy, well-built young woman of twenty cannot live upon cheap fish, bread and butter, water and tea, for any length of time without some loss, both of flesh and spirit, and, leaning back now in the hard, un-

comfortable seat of the train, with the scorching sun beating on her face, and the sight, smell and sound of the cheap and dirty holiday humanity all about her, Dorothy's brave heart seemed to melt within her. Tears burned her closed eyelids, and presently stole, one by one, down her cheeks.

One of the women with babies, a woman whose coarse voice and language and aggressive cockney accent had jarred intolerably upon Dorothy since the beginning of the journey, developed an altogether unexpected kindness and gentleness at sight of the girl's white, tear-stained face.

"Change seats with me, missy. You'll be better by the window."

Her other fellow travelers followed suit in kindness, and Dorothy reproached herself for having condemned them as noisy, vulgar and dirty. Still, it was a relief when the train slowed down at Bournemouth, and came at last to a standstill by the platform.

As she rose from her seat, her eyes fell upon the Hon. Darcy Derrick, looking cool, "well groomed," and handsome, in a light gray suit and straw hat, smoking a cigar on the platform, while he eagerly scanned the faces of the passengers by the London train. Catching sight of Dorothy, he threw away his cigar and hurried to the door of her compartment to help her out. She noticed that his hands were trembling, and, glancing quickly at his face, she saw that his mouth was twitching and that anxiety was written on his every feature. He composed himself under her glance of surprise, and hurriedly asked her if she had found her sister any better.

"Thank you very much. She is no worse."

"I cannot make you understand," he exclaimed, "how desperately anxious I have been ever since I heard at your lodgings this morning that you had gone to London

to see your sister. I said to myself: 'As it is so near the end of the tour, she would not go unless her sister was very ill, perhaps dying. If she finds her dead I believe it will kill her.' I tortured myself imagining the scene until I was nearly mad. I came to the station and began meeting trains from London two and a half hours ago. 'Great heavens!' I said to myself, 'supposing that she should not return—that she should leave like this, without a word of farewell!' "

"Surely, you didn't think I could be so ungrateful——" Dorothy was beginning, when he cut her short.

"Ah! don't talk of gratitude between you and me. Gratitude is such a hateful, cold word, though I am grateful to you for letting me adore you, even though you hate me in return."

"I don't hate you, Mr. Darcy."

"Prove it by jumping into a fly and driving off to have a little dinner with me at the hotel close to the theatre. You look dreadfully pale; I am certain that in the excitement of seeing your sister you forgot your lunch?"

"I did; but——"

"But you owe it to me, for I went lunchless, too, out of anxiety about you. And you needn't worry about the proprieties, for my mother is coming to this very hotel to-morrow, and you will be lunching with her as soon as she comes. You have only just thirty-five minutes before you will have to dress for the theatre; it will do you good, and make me so happy! Here is the fly. Let me help you in. And now, driver, the Carrington Hotel as fast as you can go!"

CHAPTER XVI

FOR PHYLLIS' SAKE.

During the course of the well chosen and dainty menu at the Carrington Hotel, Darcy Derrick was sufficiently tactful to refrain from troubling his leading lady with any reference to the state of his affections, and confined himself to sympathetic inquiries about her sister, and witty and amusing chatter on different subjects.

As soon as the tour was finished, so he informed her, he intended hiring a yacht and cruising about in the Mediterranean.

"Lying on deck all day," he said, watching her closely, "with one's hands behind one's head and one's eyes fixed on the blue sky above, and ears filled with the music of the swishing waves. The only sensible thing to do in August and September, isn't it?"

"Yes, for any one who can afford it," Dorothy answered.

Her thoughts flew to Phyllis and to Phyllis' longing for a sea voyage. Both sisters were passionately fond of the sea, and at this moment Dorothy, hot and tired, with an aching head and a heart weighed down by anxiety and grim forebodings, felt that almost any sacrifice would be justifiable to secure rest and freedom and fresh sea breezes for Phyllis and herself on just such a trip as Mr. Derrick had planned.

"You look dreadfully pale," her companion suddenly exclaimed. "Do let me give you some more Burgundy."

"No, thank you. I am not used to wine."

"Don't you like it?"

"I used to. But I have not tasted it for quite three years now. In fact," she added reflectively, "I can hardly say that I have dined for three years, although, of course, I have had food of a sort."

He looked earnestly at her, and a moisture crept into his large, blue eyes.

"It makes what I eat half choke me to think of it," he said in a very low voice. "To think, I mean, of you and your sister, beautiful and friendless, working your youth and health away, facing starvation and death together, and yet retaining that lovely, lily-like purity of mind that sets you apart from almost all the women I have ever known; I can't tell you how the thought of it touches me. Now, I am not going to weary you by any outburst of sentiment, so don't look at the clock and take your gloves up. We have plenty of time to get across to the theatre, and I must say one thing to leave in your mind as a parting thought. It rests with you whether you and your sweet sister go on leading these cruel, wasted lives, or whether all your troubles and worries cease at once forever. There! Don't look frightened. I won't say one word more on the subject; but don't forget my words."

She did not forget them.

She recalled them over her solitary supper in her mean little lodgings that night; she went to bed and lay awake thinking of them; and, lying there in the darkness, she owned to herself that had it been Aylmer Read instead of Darcy Derrick, she would have accepted his offer with a light heart, and even not without a certain tremulous gladness.

It was not, she told herself, that she was in love with Aylmer Read, whom in her life she had not met half a dozen times. But, given sufficient time and opportunity, she might well have become so. Something in the

straight gaze of Aylmer Read's brown eyes and in the deep, mellow sound of his voice had inspired in her a feeling of restful confidence. She knew that he had loved her at first sight, and that he had become an art student solely that he might be near her; and she remembered almost every word they had exchanged during that walk together from the Grassmarket Theatre to Sloane street.

All the Hon. Darcy Derrick's protestations availed less with her than those few words spoken by Aylmer Read three months ago.

"The chief wish of my life is to know you and become your friend." "Love is the one thing which idealizes life and makes it worth living, and you will find it out some day." "Only a woman can make a man happy, and only a man can make a woman happy."

Dorothy sighed as she recalled his words and tone, and turned impatiently upon her pillow. She had thought of Aylmer Read very often since they had parted, and always with a hope, which amounted to a conviction, that they would meet again. His was just the type she most admired and felt most needful to supplement her own. He was very brave and very firm, with strong feelings held in check by a reverent gentleness for women, and a keen sense of humor tempered by great kindness toward all men. A big, broad, manly man, of sweet, even temper, and very slow to wrath—a man she could look up to, a man she could love.

While, as to Darcy Derrick——

Truth to tell, Darcy Derrick's personality affected her not at all; or, if at all, unpleasantly. Now and then even, she had been moved by his look or touch to sudden, unreasoning hate, for which she had afterward reproached herself. But Dorothy's deepest feelings were not easily roused. In all the world she only truly loved one human being—her sister Phyllis. Her really great powers of

loving one of the opposite sex had never yet been called into play, although, with all her capability of hating as strongly as she loved, she detested, for her sister's sake, the unseen and unknown Sergius Trevelyan.

But at this juncture neither hate nor love was in question. In a very few days' time she would be in desperate straits for money, while her total failure as an actress, together with her recent inability to sell her drawings, had seriously weakened her belief in herself. Two other persons—her sister Phyllis and poor, helpless Cresswell, depended upon her utterly, and looked to her for entire support; and now, as a profession, marriage—which, according to Dr. Morgan, was a woman's only vocation—was offered to her—marriage with a man young, handsome, well off, her superior in social station, passionately devoted to her; a man, too, who had already shown her the greatest kindness and generosity, and who had been the means of providing her with remunerative work for the past few weeks.

Every one seemed to think she ought to be touched by Darcy Derrick's devotion, and hasten to accept him. His mother had urged his cause, and Mrs. Stourton-Chepe had done her utmost to dispose Dorothy favorably toward him. In strong contrast with the secret and shame-faced wrong of her sister by the villainous Sergius Trevelyan, the Hon. Darcy Derrick's infatuation for his leading lady, and her apparent indifference to it, was the common talk of the company. He told every one he met that he loved her and wanted to marry her. It had even come to the ears of his invalid brother, Lord Derrick, who had written to remonstrate with his junior on "throwing himself away upon an actress." Mrs. Stourton-Chepe had seen Lord Derrick's letter and had quoted it to Dorothy, who had tossed her pretty head and declared that Lord Derrick need have no fear that she

would enter his family or any other in which she was not welcome. But, beyond all this, and an infinitely stronger argument in Dorothy's favor, was his suggestion of that yachting cruise in the Mediterranean which, if Phyllis could but enjoy it also, might be the means of restoring her to health.

Dorothy thought of all these things, tossing restlessly upon her sleepless bed. She could not bring herself to regard the absolute personality of Darcy Derrick, as a necessary part of the bargain, with any sentiment but a slight repugnance. The womanish beauty of his delicate white hands, the transparent pallor of his skin, the languishing look in his long, blue eyes under their silky, dark eyelashes, and, above all, the vivid red of his underlip which he perpetually gnawed when excited—all these things, and even his graceful figure and smooth, sweet voice, which other women regarded as irresistible, inspired in Dorothy a feeling of impatience and irritation.

Her nature instinctively revolted against allying herself with a type for which she had neither sympathy nor liking, and although, owing in part to her mother's early death and her sheltered home education, Dorothy understood little more of the married state at twenty than she had done at four, she yet shrank from the thought of becoming the wife of a man for whom she could not bring herself to care. She had been very well educated according to the accepted ideas for the education of wealthy young ladies of the middle class. She knew by heart all the stock anecdotes of kings and queens which are supposed to constitute the History of England; she could add up easy sums, play dance music more or less imperfectly at sight, read Goethe's "Faust" (revised) in the original, make herself understood among intelligent French people, sing Italian songs of moderate compass moderately in tune, dance the waltz popular when she was

at school, walk with head erect and toes turned at the proper angle, and, best of all, she could speak her own language without a trace of cockney and with only occasional blunders in grammar. In a word, she was very well educated.

But of the nature of man as man, and woman as woman, of the difference between them, and the passions that move them, she knew exactly nothing at all. Otherwise she would never have decided before she fell asleep that night that perhaps it was her duty to become the wife of the Hon. Darcy Derrick.

Darcy's mother, when she arrived at Bournemouth on the following day, tried vainly to reason with her son on the subject of his infatuation for Miss Knight.

"Of course, she is only hanging back to draw you on," she said. "I wonder, dearest, you can let her play with you. You are getting positively thin and worn with worrying about her. And what is she, after all, but a penniless nobody, besides being the very worst actress I have ever seen."

"She is a goddess!" he murmured. "The most peerlessly lovely being ever born into this world."

"But you have talked like that of others," cried his mother. "So many, many others, my dear son, whose names you have by this time forgotten."

"No woman has made me feel as this one does," he returned. "Mother, I must have her—I cannot live without her!"

He caught his mother's hand in his hot, fevered clasp.

"I am going mad for love of her," he said. "Her very coldness, her indifference, thrill me more than other women's tenderest caresses. How exquisite, how rapturous it will be to see the coldness turn to red-hot hate, and from hate melt into burning love!"

"Hate!" Lady Derrick repeated. "Do you mean that she could hate you?"

"She can, and will," he answered dreamily. "I know her nature. Under that cold crust lies a pent-up volcano of emotion. She is made of 'spirit, fire and dew,' like Browning's 'Evelyn Hope.' Look at that exquisite, thin face of hers, in which the least feeling shows through the fine, pale skin, soft and clear as the inner petals of a newly-blown blush rose. Look at the perfect modeling of her arms, round without the least approach to fatness; all through the third act last night I never once took my eyes off her arms—a man might well sell his soul to feel them clinging around his neck. There is something in her voice, a cooling, caressing quality that allures irresistibly, with every now and then a cold, almost hard, note dropped in to pique a man by the sharp contrast. I tell you, mother, Dorothy has all the fascinations of all the women I have ever met and loved, and of others that I have dreamed of, rolled into one."

"You are a poet, my darling," said his mother, fondly stroking his brow, "and you talk yourself into these frenzies of loving. Your eyes are quite haggard and your hair is moist with excitement. How dare she be so hard and cruel to my dear, handsome boy? She ought to think herself highly honored by your love, without any hope of ever becoming your wife! But to presume to refuse that honor——"

"Don't, mother, for heaven's sake! If you adopt that tone toward her my cause is hopeless. If you wish to save my life and reason you must work with me in this. All she cares for in the world at present—until she has married me—is her sister. Play upon that. Tell her how much I feel for them both, how much I have told you about them——"

"Have you ever seen the sister?"

"I? No. How should I have seen her? But I believe they are very much alike, so no doubt she is beautiful. And Dorothy adores her."

"I cannot understand these ice-cold young English women, who love their sisters better than their sweet-hearts," observed Lady Derrick. "But if marrying her will make you happy, why, you must marry her, I suppose. And I will do anything in the world to help you, my dearest one."

So she treated Dorothy, after lunch, to more anecdotes of her son's infancy and boyhood, all tending to show him in a heroic and irresistible light, and she dilated upon his filial devotion and upon the persecution he had endured for many years from his jealous brothers and sisters and his unforgiving father—persecution which had driven him from his home and made an exile of him in France and Italy for nearly seven years. Through all that time she described, with tears in her eyes, how he had never forgotten his poor mother, but had constantly written to her and sent her flowers and little gifts in token of his unswerving loyalty and love.

"And no doubt, my dear," Lady Derrick concluded, with feminine astuteness, "it is his fondness for me which makes him so thoroughly understand the love between you and your sister. I assure you, Darcy has spoken of it to me with tears in his eyes. He tells me he has never even seen your sister, but he speaks of her as a brother already."

All these sayings were not without their due weight on Dorothy. But on the last night of the week at Bournemouth the Hon. Darcy did much to imperil his chances of success by his own indiscretion.

The theatre was less empty than usual in the more expensive parts, it having got about among some of the fashionable hotels in the town that "Love's Right" was

rather immoral, that "Mr. Darcy," the author and manager, was the late Lord Derrick's second son, and that Miss Knight, his leading lady, was a singularly beautiful woman. Mr. Derrick had been dining with some friends, and came on with them afterward to a box, arriving half-way through the performance. His friends, all of the male sex, were enthusiastic in their appreciation of Dorothy's good looks, and during the third act the Hon. Darcy, moved by love, excitement and champagne, left his box, and, going round to the stage, watched his lady love with enraptured eyes from the wings.

When Zara Carewe's last exit arrived, Dorothy made her way toward her dressing-room, carefully drawing her long, tight gloves off her arms, which were too fair to require the customary paint and powder. Suddenly, in the passage from which the dressing-room doors opened, she found herself seized in the grasp of a man who was closely following her, and who, pinioning her arms against her sides, pressed his hot lips on her bare shoulders.

In a moment, by a sharp movement, she had freed herself, and, tearing off the glove she was unfastening, had struck her manager with it full in the face.

More than one member of the company witnessed the incident as they hurried to their rooms to change their costumes for the last act, and more than one heard, too, Dorothy's exclamation in tones of unconcealed scorn and anger:

"How dare you!"

For, at Darcy's kiss, into the girl's heart there swept an uncontrollable feeling of repulsion and disgust. She could not even proceed with her stage toilette without washing and scrubbing her white shoulders until the skin was reddened and sore. She had begun rather to like Darcy Derrick, to be touched by his devotion, and to regard marriage with him as her possible fate at least with

equanimity; but that kiss made her for the time absolutely hate him; nor would she exchange one word with him during two or three days that followed.

At last, on the Wednesday of the Plymouth week, Mr. Jack Wyverley, dispatched by his friend and manager on a very important mission to Miss Dorothy Knight's lodgings, found her painting materials ready on the table of her sitting-room, but the lady herself absent. She had gone, so the landlady informed him, to make a pencil sketch of the shipping in the harbor from the Hoe. And here Jack Wyverley found her seated, not far from Drake's statue, not sketching, but staring out to sea with a troubled look in her brilliant, gray-green eyes.

It was still early in the forenoon, and there was no one else in sight. It was an admirable opportunity for accomplishing his errand, and Jack Wyverley grinned and showed his handsome white teeth as he took his place on the bench beside her, after raising his hat and bidding her good-morning.

"I have come as an ambassador," he began cheerfully.

"Oh! From Mr. Darcy, I suppose?" she said coldly.

"Yes. But I want to talk business. It isn't necessary for me to say he adores you, and is simply dying for love of you, because you know it."

"I have heard all about it," she returned wearily, "and I don't want to hear any more. And if you are going to talk business, Mr. Wyverley, I will tell you this frankly—that I know quite well it would be to my interest to marry Mr. Derrick, but that I have tried hard to love him sufficiently, and I simply can't."

"He doesn't hope for your love yet. Though you must be awfully hard-hearted, I think, Miss Knight, not to be sorry for him."

"Yes. But we don't love people just because we are sorry for them."

"Don't people say 'pity is akin to love?' What is there about Darcy you don't like? Most people think him a regular Adonis."

Jack Wyverley had a bright "afternoon tea-table" manner with women of education that inspired liking and confidence. Dorothy turned on him with puzzled eyes.

"The odd part of it is," she said, "that I don't know why I don't like him. He is very kind and very amusing, and, of course, very good looking, too, in a style that I don't in the least admire; but—I really can't describe it—the moment he begins to get in the least lover-like I positively hate him!"

Into Jack Wyverley's prominent blue eyes there flashed a sudden look of comprehension, and even of sympathy; but the next moment his red face appeared as expressionless as ever.

"That's awkward, of course," he said briskly; "but, as your own dislike is altogether unreasonable and unfounded, it's certain to pass away. Do you remember what Mrs. Malaprop says about sympathy and aversion? 'As both are sure to wear off, it's safer in matrimony to begin with a little aversion.' Seriously, Miss Knight, poor Darcy is in an awfully bad way, realizing that it's the last week of the tour, and that he has somehow offended you, and he's off his head for fear of losing you. So he did me the honor of taking my advice. I've made a glorious muddle of my own affairs, but I am *At* over managing other people's. Now, I said this: 'As Miss Knight is not to be moved by sentiment, come to business.' We had a long talk, and agreed on a certain course, and as a result I have been up to London, and I have brought to you," he went on, drawing a bulky envelope from under his coat, "a copy of the late Lord Derrick's will, which you have no doubt already seen quoted in the newspapers, by which twenty-five thousand pounds came into Darcy's

possession a few months ago through the bequest of his grandfather, and also the draft of a legal document by which two hundred a year will be settled absolutely for her life upon your sister from the moment that you become the Hon. Mrs. Darcy Derrick."

"On my sister?"

"Yes. Darcy knows money is no temptation to you, except for your sister's sake. He will come into fifteen thousand a year, and the title and estates when his brother, who is consumptive, dies. But, until that event, with his present income of only about one thousand a year, and a little allowance from his mother, I think myself it is rather a handsome offer. If you accept it, a lawyer in this town will be immediately sent to make it perfectly legal and binding. Darcy says he knows he is rather extravagant, and that therefore he would prefer that the money for your sister's maintenance should be taken right out of his control. Once your anxiety about her is relieved, he feels that he may perhaps win your love."

Dorothy read through both papers carefully. When she returned them to Mr. Wyverley tears stood in her eyes.

"It is very, very good and thoughtful and generous of him," she murmured, "and I am not in a position to refuse such an offer. But you must tell him the truth, Mr. Wyverley. I don't love him; but I will try and be worthy of his unselfish love. I have no money and no friends, and not even any talent," she added sadly, "or I should even now say no. But I am in desperate need of money. It sounds a mean thing to marry for that, but as it isn't for myself I want it, it cannot be so bad. If Mr. Derrick will take me on such terms, I will try to be a good wife to him. And surely it will be easy to love any one so good and generous, whose mother, and whose friends, are alike devoted to him."

Her clear, sweet tones, the truth that shone from her tearful eyes, and the maidenly blushes that passed over her sensitive skin—all these things affected Mr. Jack Wyverley strangely.

He felt his cheeks grow hot, and an unaccountable impulse came upon him to hurl the papers in his hand over the cliff into the sea which stretched, blue and sparkling, many feet below. But after thirty-eight years of checkered existence, he knew the folly of yielding to impulses, and after a short pause he rose, raised his hat, and left Dorothy alone with her thoughts.

Only where his heart, from the sentimental and not from the anatomical point of view, used to be, he felt an odd soreness.

"I've done a good many mean things for a pal before now," he told himself on his way back to the Hon. Darcy's hotel, "but I'm bothered if this isn't the meanest of them all!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BLOW FALLS.

The last day of the tour of "Love's Right" had arrived, and for the first and last time the part of Zara Carewe was to be performed by an understudy.

For Miss Dorothy Knight, the original exponent of the part, was to be married to her manager, the Hon. Darcy Derrick, in St. James' Church, at half-past two that day, and the happy pair were to start on a honeymoon to Penzance and the Scilly Isles by the train which left Plymouth at a quarter to four.

Everything, down to the minutest details, had been settled with the most wonderful expedition. Some charming rooms had been taken for Phyllis, and thither she was to be transported, under Nurse Rose's care, in a week's time, to await the return of Mr. and Mrs. Derrick from their honeymoon. Afterward a cruise round about the Cornish coast was to precede Darcy's triumphant bringing home of his bride to Derrick Castle, and her introduction to the other members of his family.

Aided by his trusty friends, Coles and Wyverley, Darcy made his arrangements with such lightning celerity that he left his fiancée no time for changing her mind. On Wednesday morning she had finally accepted him, and Wednesday afternoon saw the drawing up by a local solicitor of the deed by which Phyllis was to enjoy two hundred a year from the hour of her sister's marriage. Wednesday evening found a diamond engagement ring on Dorothy's finger. Thursday was spent by Darcy in

London, whence he returned to Plymouth with a special marriage license in his pocket. Friday morning was passed in shopping, and the afternoon in a long drive on which, at Dorothy's insistence, Mr. and Mrs. Stourton-Chepe accompanied the engaged couple, and when at length Saturday morning dawned, it seemed to Dorothy incredible that this should be indeed her wedding day.

Not once had she allowed the Hon. Darcy to be alone with her from the moment when he had, on receipt of Jack Wyverley's message, joined her on the sea front and heard her own lips confirm her acceptance of his offer. Something in his eyes startled and embarrassed her, making her dread the inevitable moment when they two should be left alone together. Meantime Mrs. Stourton-Chepe was profuse in her congratulations.

"I never saw a man so madly in love in all my life," she said. "You have played your cards very well, little girl. That stand-off *hauteur* of yours wouldn't have done with everybody, but it was very successful in Darcy's case. Of course, he's extremely poor, considering his position. But I'm told there's every probability of his brother dying before he is forty, and then you will be Lady Derrick."

It was useless to tell the true state of the case to Mrs. Stourton-Chepe. Old Marmaduke Strutt, the melancholy, low comedian, was the only member of the company who guessed Miss Knight's real motive in marrying her manager. When Marmaduke congratulated her, she looked him straight in the face, while tears gathered in her eyes.

"Mr. Derrick has been very kind and generous," she said; "but if I had not made such a terrible failure, or if I were alone in the world, I would not do it."

She could not write and tell her sister that she was going to be married to a man whose name she had hardly

yet mentioned. It would seem a reproach and a bitter reminder to her, Dorothy thought, in Phyllis' neglected and forsaken condition. So she merely told her that she was going to Penzance, and that there was now no more need for worrying about money, as she had accepted another engagement which would last a long time.

"And so, as you want change, dear," Dorothy wrote, "and Nurse Rose tells me in her letters that you will be able to travel next week, I want you to come under her care to some nice, bright rooms I have taken for you opposite the sea here, and to wait in Plymouth until I come back to you, in a very few days' time. I am sending twenty pounds instead of five this week, for I shall have plenty of money in my new engagement, and you are to have just everything you want, my darling."

But, although she wrote so brightly and appeared quite cheerful and interested while shopping in the town with Mrs. Stourton-Chepe, there were moments—many, many moments—when Dorothy felt she would give ten years of her life to retract her promise, and be free again. Now and then some look of this flashed into her eyes, and was legible there even to the hard-voiced, worldly woman who was her constant companion during those last two days before the wedding.

"I do believe," Mrs. Stourton-Chepe exclaimed once in a low voice, suddenly laying her hand on Dorothy's in a glove-shop while the attendant was looking for something on the shelves, "I do believe you are really in love with some one else all the time."

Dorothy blushed.

"I once met a man I think I could have loved," she said.

"Nothing more than that?"

"Nothing more."

"Oh, well, of course we have all of us married women

met men we could have loved better than our husbands," observed the elder lady, philosophically. "The great thing is to meet them before and not after marriage. Passionate love wears off in a week or two in any case, and it is really not well bred for a young girl to be in love with any man before she marries him. There is a great deal too much silly nonsense written about falling in love, where we English women are concerned, at least. Of course, a poetic and emotional creature like poor, dear Darcy, without one drop of Anglo-Saxon blood in his veins, goes to the maddest extremes of emotion. But nineteen out of every twenty properly brought-up young English women marry because they are uncomfortable at home, or because they're afraid of being old maids, or because they would like a house of their own, and servants to bully, or because they want money. The twentieth marries because she loves the man, and in those cases he generally gets tired first and neglects her, because he is too sure of her, and her jealousy worries him. Your attitude of polite friendliness, and a sort of appreciative liking, is the right one for a bride, take my word for it."

Yet, in spite of Mrs. Stourton-Chepe's approbation and encouragement, Dorothy, on the eve of her wedding, was thoroughly unhappy. For several hours after retiring supperless to her room she lay on her bed fully dressed, face downward, burying her cheeks in a pillow soaked with tears. Once or twice she even started up with the crazy idea of dashing off somewhere—anywhere, where the Hon. Darcy would not be able to find her for the ceremony of the following day.

It was the remembrance of the money which Darcy had given her to send to Phyllis which restrained her.

"He has bought me," she whispered to herself in a fit of passionate weeping. "It is cruel and cowardly of him!

He knows quite well I can't love him, and when he looks at me in that horrible, snake-like way, as if he were going to spring at me, I absolutely hate him! And yet he forces me to marry him for Phyllis' sake. It is cruel and mean!"

But in the morning an apathy which was akin to resignation took the place of the night's excitement. She was to be married from the hotel where Lady Derrick was staying, Darcy's mother having arrived in Plymouth for the ceremony in the afternoon of the preceding day, and at about one o'clock Dorothy proceeded to the hotel in a cab and made her way upstairs to Lady Derrick's rooms.

Miss Knight was entering into the married state without love and with considerable trepidation, but she was a woman, and a very womanly one, and no woman can get married without a little excitement and a natural desire to look her best.

Owing to the recent death of Darcy's father, the ceremony was to be strictly private, only the Stourton-Chepes, Mr. Wyverley and Mr. Coles having been invited to the church. But in a simply-cut, white serge traveling costume, with fine lace ruffles at the neck and wrists, a little silver embroidery on the vest, and a tiny white bonnet crowning her bright hair, Dorothy, pale, with bright, frightened eyes, looked beautiful enough to justify any infatuation.

Lady Derrick was, as Dorothy expected she would be, all tears and effusion.

Dorothy would be good to her darling boy, she knew. His devotion to her had been so wonderful and had lasted so long a time—Lady Derrick was clearly surprised at this—but with a poetic nature such as his, unlimited sympathy and tenderness was necessary, and Lady Derrick hoped her dear Dorothy would be ready to humor and study his peculiar temperament.

In similar discourse and much shedding of tears Darcy's mother beguiled the time until, at two o'clock, the Stourton-Chepes arrived, and all four proceeded to the church where the ceremony was to be performed.

In after life the scene would often pass again before Dorothy's eyes as a dream, and not as any waking experience. Lady Derrick, pale, stout and tearful, in her crepe-trimmed gown, drying her eyes with a black-edged lawn pocket handkerchief, and supported by Mrs. Stourton-Chepe, in her best gray silk gown—Mrs. Stourton-Chepe, whose hard face took on a look that was almost regretful when her eyes rested upon the bride.

Mr. Wyverley, Mr. Coles and Mr. Stourton-Chepe stood close to the altar rails, looking very much alike in their regulation tall hats, frock coats, gray trousers, light gloves and white "button-holes"—well groomed, well bred, fresh colored and expressionless. Dorothy caught herself reflecting that Mr. Coles' single eyeglass came as a boon to enable his friends to distinguish him among other young men.

The Hon. Darcy himself was lividly pale; his hand, as it touched that of his bride's, was cold and clammy, and the contact sent a chill through her. Was it the light from the stained-glass window, she wondered, as she glanced quickly up into her bridegroom's face, that spread so deathly a hue over his features and lit his eyes with so strange a fire?

Wyverley was watching him, too, and wondering whether the fellow would be able to get through the service after the repeated brandies and sodas he had that morning drained to "pull himself together." He had looked, as Wyverley phrased it, "more like going to his funeral than his wedding" an hour before—a helpless, nerveless, shivering wreck, and even now Wyverley feared lest at any moment he might break down.

Wyverley could have wished also that the bride would have looked more self-conscious and blushing, and like an ordinary bride. That calm of hers had something sacrificial in it, and one quick, strained look she gave round the church on entering set him thinking of the eyes of a trapped bird.

Darcy's voice, when he spoke the responses, was low and thick; that of the bride, on the other hand, was clear and sweet.

She took her part in the marriage service with mechanical correctness, hardly noting its progress, so strong was the reaction after the excitement and fatigue of the preceding days, and so determined the self-control by which she concealed her real feelings.

In the same passive fashion she endured the congratulations and handshakings immediately after the ceremony and the little natural subdued chatter and laughter during the signing in the registry. She was glad that the drive back to the hotel was so short, and that the streets were full of people. Darcy was by her side—so close to her that she could feel his hot breath upon her ear and cheek—and she felt thankful that at least he could not kiss her yet.

Once at the hotel the bridegroom seemed restlessly eager to be off again to the station. He had the tickets to take, he urged, and they must be at the station fully a quarter of an hour before the train started, and he seemed absolutely disappointed when his best man produced two first-class single tickets to Penzance, and informed him that he had already interviewed the guard and secured a compartment for the bridal pair.

At the last the leave-takings were hurried. Dorothy cut the cake, and the four guests and Lady Derrick tasted it, while Darcy drained several glasses of champagne.

Then the bride hurried away to change, with the help

of Lady Derrick's maid, her white bonnet for a shady straw hat, trimmed with white roses, which, with a long, fawn-colored dust cloak, took away the bridal appearance from her costume.

On her return to the sitting-room, she found Darcy in a state of intense excitement and impatience to be gone.

He hardly gave her time to say farewell to those assembled before, drawing her arm through his, he made her almost run down the hotel stairs and past the grinning and bowing waiters and hotel servants into the open carriage which was waiting to take them to the station.

Something very like a curse escaped his lips as a few grains of a well directed shower of rice trickled down his neck from the open window of his mother's sitting-room.

He had been biting his lips until they were cut through and marked with blood. Dorothy noted this, and instinctively drew away from him.

"We don't get to Penzance until nearly seven o'clock," he whispered, "and from here we have an uninterrupted run until we reach Liskeard at 4:32. So at last I shall have three-quarters of an hour in which to tell you I love you. Oh, I am so sick of all the vulgar fuss and show and flummery, the publicity, the paganism, of a modern wedding!

"Does it all jar upon you as upon me? It is so hopelessly bourgeois and crude, this daylight dressing up before hordes of leering strangers! How much sweeter it would have been to tap at your window one night, and hold out my arms for you to come down into them and nestle against my heart, and then to steal away under cover of the darkness to some quiet spot where no one knew us and we knew no one! Don't you feel that, too, my Dorothy, my wife?"

"I am afraid I am not romantic," she returned with a nervous laugh. She was trying to fight down her sick dread of that long railway journey, shut in with this man with the hot breath and shining eyes, whose property she had now become.

The carriage stopped at the station, and her husband helped her to alight. Their luggage was already in the train, thanks to Jack Wyverley, who alone had been permitted by Darcy to precede them at the station. There were a good many people on the platform, and notably a large contingent from a burlesque company playing at Devonport, and over for the day. It had got about that there was a bridal pair going by the train for Penzance, and that Miss Knight and "Mr. Darcy" of the "Love's Right" Company were the bride and bridegroom.

Considerable interest was in consequence taken in the handsome young couple by the loiterers on the platform, an interest which Darcy strongly resented, and which he tried to evade by hurrying Dorothy into the compartment reserved for them and pulling the blinds sharply down.

Unfortunately for his plans, he had not been quite sufficiently expeditious in his movements to elude the sharp eyes of a little, over-dressed woman, with straw-colored hair and heavily-blackened eyes, who suddenly pressed forward as he was drawing up the window of the carriage and thrust in her ungloved and beringed right hand.

"Why, if it isn't Cupid—Cupid Trevelyan—that we've all lost sight of for months past! No good your altering the color of your hair and shaving off your fine mustache, Sergius, my boy! I should know you anywhere. Do you mean to pretend not to recognize me—Leila Montgomery, of the 'Settled for Life' Company? It's too thin, that's what it is! And I do declare, you have Miss

Knight in there with you! How do you do, my dear? My! You do look pretty! So your beau's done the honest thing by you, now he's free, and married you all right for the second time? I didn't think he had so much good in him; I didn't, indeed. Well, ta-ta, both of you! The train's moving off, and I wish you a happy second honeymoon!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

The train began to move slowly out of the station.

Darcy left the window, and, throwing himself into a corner seat, glanced across at Dorothy. Her features looked white and hard, as though carved in stone, and her distended eyes were fixed upon his face.

He took off his hat and busied himself placing it in the rack. Then he passed his handkerchief over his brow and upper lip, which had become suddenly moist.

"I am sorry, my dear one," he began, "that our tour should have started with so unpleasant an incident as that dreadful little painted person, whom I need hardly tell you I have never seen before, should mistake me for Sergius Trevelyan. I suppose she detected in him some slight resemblance to my mother's family. I remember the agent Whitlock thought I was rather like the fellow when I first called at his office."

Dorothy did not speak, although he paused as if expecting her to do so. She remained staring at him in just the same attitude as before, with her hands tightly clasped in her lap.

"It was odd that she should make a mistake about you, too," he went on presently. "I should not have thought from your portraits that you and your sister were so much alike as all that. But I should say Miss Mount-Graham, or whatever she called herself, had been lunching too freely; don't you think so, too?"

Still no answer. His face grew wet again, and his

heart was thumping hard. Some other emotion had for the moment driven passion from his mind; but, glancing across at Dorothy and seeing how still she sat, he resolved to disregard that ominous quiet of hers, and, crossing to where she sat, he threw his arms about her and tried to draw her to him.

"At last we are alone!" he murmured. "My bride, my wife!"

"Wait!" she cried, as, exerting all her strength, she thrust him from her. "Wait! Sit over there, just opposite, that I may see your face. And now tell me—what did that woman mean?"

"Why, what silly idea have you got in your head? Just because a little, half-tipsy actress mistakes us both for other people. Didn't you see her flushed face? She wasn't sober, and had no notion of what she was saying——"

"I did not see her face, but I saw yours. And yours looked guilty!"

She breathed rather than spoke the last word. Her throat was parched and dry, and an awful fear seemed to pull at her heart. It was not possible; it was too horrible! The thought was a grotesque nightmare—and yet—and yet it was fear she had read upon Darcy Derick's face while that woman spoke to him!

He had taken the seat facing her as she had bidden him, half laughing and trying to carry the thing off in a light-hearted and indulgent fashion, conscious all the time of the unwavering stare of her gray eyes. He bent over now and tried to take her hands.

"Of course, I was afraid," he said. "I am so madly in love with you that for the past thirty or forty hours I've been distracted with fear lest anything or any one should come between us. You don't know what it is to love as I love you. But I shall try to teach you."

Again he stretched his arms out toward her, and again she pushed him from her, this time roughly, desperately.

She was thinking hard all the time as she sat there silent. She was recalling the picture her sister's words had painted of Sergius Trevelyan, the soft-voiced, sympathetic, poetry-loving Adonis, and details she had forgotten sprang with sudden clearness into her mind—Trevelyan's hints as to his noble origin and banishment from his rightful position, his half-Italian, half-Irish extraction, his soft, musical voice, his large, blue eyes, with their long, curled lashes, his delicate, white hands.

She sprang from her seat with a loud cry.

"Good heavens! You are Sergius Trevelyan!"

Dead silence for a few seconds while bride and bridegroom faced each other, and only the noise of the hurrying train dinned in their ears—the train which was bearing them away to begin their married life together.

There had been no questioning note in Dorothy's cry. It breathed the fullest, the most hideous, conviction. As a lightning flash suddenly illumines a hidden horror, the truth had appeared before her. She needed no further corroboration; and Darcy knew this, and in the silence was planning how to meet the situation.

Before she could divine his intentions, he was on his knees and at her feet, lividly pale and shaking with excitement, while he clutched at her gown as though begging for mercy.

"Listen!" he cried in a choked voice. "Dorothy, don't hate me! You can't hate me when you know everything. After all, I haven't deceived you much. I am Darcy Derrick; you know my real position, my mother, my friends. You are my wife, and I worship the ground you walk on. Don't tear yourself away from me, Dorothy, for mercy's sake! Think, dear, how I love you!"

You never asked me if I were Sergius Trevelyan; you wouldn't have married me if you had known; and I had to marry you—I couldn't live without you! From the moment when I first saw your portrait, nearly a year ago, I knew, I felt, that you would belong to me some day; that you were the one woman in the world for me, and must be mine. Ah, don't look at me in that hard, stony way! What was that other woman that she should come between us? All I cared for in her was her resemblance to you. I used to sit and stare at your picture, and hang over it and kiss and fondle it hour after hour, and I would kiss her, too, because her mouth was like yours, though not half so beautiful. She was as moonlight compared unto sunlight, and water unto wine, compared with you. She was dying for love of me, and lonely and miserable, and I took pity upon her; but I have forgotten her long ago, as a man forgets a partner with whom he has danced away a stray half hour. Dorothy, you have never loved yet; you don't know what love means. We must both forget the past; it has nothing to do with us or with our future life. You are mine now; it is Fate; you were meant for me from the beginning, you and your shining eyes and sunny hair and rose-pink skin and sweet, white neck—what wouldn't I have done to gain you? For telling a few paltry, little lies you must forgive me—why, I would risk death itself in any dreadful form to have you mine for half an hour. And now you are mine for life!”

He sprang to his feet as he spoke and tried to fold her in his arms where she sat, white and rigid with horror which seemed to turn her dumb. But as she felt his embrace about her, disgust at his touch brought her back to life, and with all her strength, which was considerable for a woman, she flung off his enfolding arms.

“You are mad!” she whispered, staring at him under

frowning brows. "A mischievous, mad beast! If I were not sure that you are mad I would kill you!"

"You shall kill me if you like. I am yours to do what you will with. But I am only mad with love for you, Dorothy. Otherwise, I am as sane as you are. Now sit down quietly, darling, and listen to me. I will promise, if you like, not to touch you until we have talked this thing out—though you will have to get used to my touch soon, and will grow to love it. There, I will sit right over in the opposite corner. Before the train stops we must come to an understanding."

She sat crouched in her corner, watching him. Deadly hate and horror such as she might have felt against some poisonous snake, fastened her fascinated gaze upon him. To her his beautifully moulded, boyish-looking face was the most hideous thing she had ever gazed upon, and each movement of his slender hands filled her with a sick repulsion. She knew now why her woman's instinct, that sure guide and protector given to her sex, had repeatedly warned her against this man, prompting her to disbelieve in his apparent kindness and generosity, to resent his touch, and to shrink from the love in his eyes. This was the heartless villain who had broken Phyllis' heart, ruined her life, and left her to starve; even now she might well die and he would be her murderer. Dorothy had to dig her nails into the palms of her hands at the thought, so passionately strong did the impulse rise within her to fasten her fingers in that man's throat and force the craven life out of him.

"We must look at things as a man and woman of the world," he began in those slow, musical tones of his, which poor Phyllis had so much loved. "Owing to my father's unnatural conduct against me, for more than seven years, ever since I was four-and-twenty, I have had to lead a dog's life, utterly unsuited to a man of my birth and breed-

ing, herding with actors and singers and that sort of Bohemian nobody, afraid to use my own name, and compelled even to disguise my appearance, to stain my hair dark with cosmetics, and use other theatrical tricks to elude duns and writs and other things even worse. My mother—the only person in this world who really understands me—gave out that I was living abroad, but on the death of my father, who was my worst enemy and persecutor, I was able to come out of my obscurity and claim acquaintance with my friends and equals. As to the twenty-five thousand pounds, I must own to you, my dear girl, that we shan't have very much of that. Just about five or six thousand I may manage to snatch from creditors' jaws, but not more. You see, I've dropped a good many hundreds over this tour, but as it won you for me, you may well believe that I don't grudge it."

She did not speak. He asked her permission to smoke, and rolled and lit a cigarette with fingers that shook a little while he proceeded to the second part of his discourse.

"When fate threw us together in Whitlock's office I knew you would be mine. It was only a question of time. Your sister's infatuation for me never moved me like your indifference. I have been so much loved by women that coldness fascinates me. Your very hatred of Sergius Trevelyan made you more attractive. To see you turn pale with the strength of your dislike against him while you spoke to me stimulated my passion and thrilled me with excitement. I knew that you would love me, that you would not be able to resist my love, and I looked eagerly forward to the moment when, folded in my arms, you would hear my confession and kiss away my self-accusing words. You learned my secret too soon, but sooner or later you would have to know it, for I never meant to meet your sister. I am sorry, very sorry, for

her; but I do not wish ever to see her again—nor will you, I am sure, desire that I should do so. Of course, she will never know that the man she, poor soul, loved so madly is her sister's husband. There is no need for any one to know that. Not one person in the 'Love's Right' company ever suspected it, and that woman at the station would never have recognized me but that she was once very much in love with me, and jealousy gave her intuition. My friends and equals don't know what became of me all those years; even my mother hardly ever knew anything of my movements; and as to Sergius Trevelyan, we can forget him altogether, or suppose him to be still in that charming health resort, Carthage, in Texas, from which you may remember my college friend wrote to tell me he had seen him pass through with a theatrical company playing in 'Madame Angot.' ”

The Hon. Darcy smiled at this point. Clearly, he was proud of his own cleverness in that matter of the letter.

“I happened to have a piece of the Grand Hotel, Carthage, note paper left, among other mementos of an extended pilgrimage in the States three years ago,” he said, while he lighted his cigarette, “so as I knew you would be worrying for news of my friend Sergius, I wrote that letter to myself to allay your natural anxiety. I don't attempt to defend my action, except by the old adage, that all is fair in love. I had to get you somehow, and I used, and would use again, any and every means within my reach. Love such as mine for you is the greatest motive power in the world. Wherever you are I must follow; your presence intoxicates me; your touch, even in cold friendliness, sends me mad!

“You need never be jealous of your sister; the affection which I gave to her was prompted by pity, but chiefly by her likeness to you, and, once possessing the original, I shall never hanker after the pale and faded copy. Long

before I left the company on learning of my father's fatal illness I had wearied of her, and I have the strongest possible wish and determination never to see her again. It was not my fault that she loved me so much and that she cannot forget me. I will do my best to help you to provide for her somewhere, though, of course, that marriage settlement will be waste paper until my brother has the decency to die; but she has passed out of my life once and for all, and so far as I am concerned, the past doesn't exist. Life is all the future—a future with you."

He seemed to have talked himself into a state of entire calmness and self-control, and even to look more or less happy and pleased with himself, as a man who, in the face of great difficulties, has attained a much-desired object.

"So now," he went on again after a pause, "that, like a good husband, I have made a clean breast of everything, you will begin to understand me better. As I have allowed nothing to stop me in my determination to win you, so I shall stop at nothing in my resolve to keep you. The dead past must bury its dead; you are my wife—that is enough for me."

"You forget," she said at last, in sharp, metallic tones, "one important point in your vile, mad schemes. I am nothing more to you, thank heaven! than any stranger in the street, for your wife, Millie Clements, is alive."

"My wife, Millie Clements, died in New York just three months ago. You can have convincing legal proof on that point. There is no woman alive who can dispute your right to call yourself my wife, the Hon. Mrs. Darcy Derick."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HONEYMOON JOURNEY.

A sense of impotent failure overwhelmed Dorothy's mind.

She had set out two months ago, intent upon the discovery and punishment of her sister's betrayer, and now, by her very desire to serve Phyllis and to provide for her future, she herself had fallen into his clutches. The grotesque irony of the thing almost inclined her to hysterical laughter; it seemed too preposterous to be taken seriously that she should have become the legal wife of the man who had posed as Sergius Trevelyan.

But as the facts of the case were gradually driven into her mind, a strange fear crept over her, the fear not of Darcy, but of herself. The knowledge of her sister's cruel wrongs and of the hideous deceptions which had been practiced upon Phyllis and herself by this smiling, white-handed man who sat there, complacently rolling and smoking cigarettes in the opposite corner of the compartment, swelled her heart with a mad rage of which she had never before deemed herself capable.

She knew that Darcy meant, in spite of all that had been revealed, in spite of her horror and loathing, in spite of his past relations with her sister, to assert over her his right as a husband to kiss and caress her at his will. She knew that he loved her as such a man understands love, and she knew, too, with an intensity of conviction, that at his touch a very devil of hate would spring up within her and lend a murderous strength to her resistance.

At every moment that they were alone together the passionate desire to kill him grew stronger. Her teeth were tightly set and her fingers clenched. She dared no longer look at him lest she should fly at his throat. Gradually the speed of the train was slackening. In a few minutes they would reach Liskeard and then she would escape, how and where she knew not. She cared little in what direction her steps might lead her, so that she were freed from the presence of this man and from that gnawing temptation to kill him, and by one act revenge her sister and regain her liberty.

He was speaking again, and at each word every nerve in her body tingled with detestation and disgust.

"In a few minutes we shall stop at Liskeard, dearest, and before then we must be friends. There are no secrets between us now. It's useless to fight against fate. The world, the law, the Church, everything is on my side. On yours, only a silly prejudice, a silly jealousy about your sister. We have buried Sergius Trevelyan and his name shall never be mentioned between us again. Your part in life is to be worshipped and learn to love me back. And now, my bride, I have waited long enough; I must kiss your sweet lips for the first time."

He began to move toward her. She held up her hand forbiddingly.

"I warn you," she said in a low, strangled voice, "that if you touch me I shall kill you!"

He laughed and made a sudden spring in her direction. But her fingers were on the handle of the door and in an instant she had flung it open.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, taken aback by the suddenness of the movement.

She did not speak. She stood holding on to the side of the door, watching him. Never, he thought, had she looked so handsome. The whole character of her face

had changed, and instead of innocent English fairness it was the dangerous beauty of a pythoness that lurked in her clenched teeth, white cheeks and burning eyes.

"You lovely demon!" he whispered with an unpleasant laugh. "Do you suppose that you can frighten me? I was never afraid of a woman yet, and I am your husband."

As the words passed his lips by an agile spring forward he seized the hanging strap of the open window and drew the door to. But before he could turn the handle Dorothy's fingers closed upon it, as she strove with both hands to force the door open.

For a few seconds they struggled in silence; then, suddenly releasing her hands, which still clung to the door handle, Darcy clasped his arms round her waist with a triumphant laugh.

"You little fool!" he said in her ear. "You don't suppose I am going to let you give me the slip now!"

Without attempting to resist, she let him disengage her hands and draw them up round his neck; the door was still unfastened, and she knew quite well what she meant to do. She saw his face, flushed and excited, come nearer and nearer to hers; she felt his panting breath upon her face, and saw that over-red mouth she so hated bend close over her own; then, with all her force, she suddenly swung round, changing places with him, so that he and not she was against the door.

He divined her intention, and reached forward with a muttered oath, as though he meant to strike her. Again she flung him from her, and this time he slipped, missed his footing, fell back against the open door, and with a quick cry threw up his hands and was hurled backward from the moving train.

Dorothy drew a long breath and sat down, pressing her hand against her heart, which had almost ceased to beat in the intensity of her excitement. She experienced no

touch of contrition for what she had done. If Darcy were dead, so much the better for the world; he was not fit to live. Her mood was such that she could have knelt down and thanked heaven for delivering her from the hand of her enemy, and so great was her relief at being rid of the odium of his presence that a sensation of absolute gladness crept over her heart.

She went to the window, carefully fastened the door and looked out. The train at this point ran along the top of an embankment, the steep, grass-covered sides of which were bordered by a wood forming part of a nobleman's estate. Dorothy wondered whether the fall would kill Darcy. Here and there big stones peeped out; would he strike his head against these? She would like to have been sure that he was dead and incapable of working any further mischief. Supposing that he were merely stunned or slightly injured, it would be some time, surely, before he could make his way to Liskeard; time enough, she trusted, would be given to make good her escape to London.

"But I hope and pray that he is dead!" she whispered.

She was conscious of no impiety in the thought. In hating him it seemed to her that she was hating an embodiment of all the evil and wickedness; the treachery, falsehood, cruelty and vice that live in the hearts of men. It never for a moment occurred to her to regard him in any different light because of the ceremony into which she had been tricked in the morning. To consider him as her husband or in any way related to her never once came into her mind. But at the thought of his mother, a sudden pity softened her eyes.

"Poor woman! If he is dead I am so sorry for her. But how terrible to love so vile a thing!"

She was still standing by the window as Liskeard was reached. Before the train stopped alongside of the plat-

form she quickly drew down all the blinds, then seating herself by the window she bent her head forward in order to give any passing railway official the impression that she was listening to the talk of some one facing her. Then, just as the train began to move out of the station, she sprang out on the platform.

"I find I shall have to go back to London, after all," she said in quiet, composed tones to the porter who hurried up. "How soon can I get there?"

"London? There is no train to London but the night mail, at 7.32, miss, and it don't reach Paddington until four in the morning."

Dorothy looked at the station clock. It was ten minutes to five. Two hours and forty minutes had to be passed before there was any hope of leaving Liskeard, and all her life through she had reason to remember those hours of waiting.

Like an ugly dream it all seemed when she afterward recalled it—the long wandering on weary feet throughout a stifling summer evening, the dull market town, the rough comment of the miners' wives and children on her smart clothes and strange appearance, comments which drove her out past the gray stone houses to moorland and fields, beyond which the outline of the Carradon Hills stood out dark against the evening sky.

At a quarter past seven, hot, tired, footsore and miserable, she crept into the station, took her ticket, and waited for the London train. Concerning Darcy's fate she knew and heard nothing, and not a sign was given at the station to lead her to suppose that anything unusual had occurred. No one expected the bridal pair at Penzance, therefore their absence might not be noticed, and, in any case, the mail by which she was to travel to London would leave Penzance long before the arrival of the Plymouth

train. Yet a touch of nervous apprehension made her start and shiver when she heard the rumble of the distant wheels.

She was traveling third class now. Her white dress and long cloak were gray with dust; extreme pallor and red, swollen eyelids marred her beauty, and the day's experiences seemed to have added ten years to her appearance. Her head was racked with pain, so that she scarcely dared to move it. Never yet through the past years of working and struggling had she known the meaning of despair. Physical fatigue and hunger, of which she became conscious for the first time, accentuated the wretchedness of her situation. Her long wandering in the heat under great stress of emotion had made her light-headed, for as soon as her eyes closed in a half-sleep she opened them with a start and a scream, fancying that in the darkness the ghastly face of Darcy Derrick stared upon her with the glaze of death in his eyes.

Fortunately she was alone in the compartment. Rising and thrusting her head from the window, she discovered that the train was passing over the identical spot at which Darcy had fallen. Had he been still alive, he would have been heard of at Liskeard station.

"Will they say I am a murderess?" she asked herself, dully, as she pressed her aching forehead against the window-frame and let the evening breeze blow in her face. "I certainly opened the door and thrust him from me toward it, and I hoped he would fall out. And I hope he is dead. That is being a murderess, I suppose, and yet I can't feel a bit wicked about it. The callous, heartless, mad villain! He deserved the tortures of the Inquisition, not such an easy death as falling out of a train in motion. I would have died a thousand times over rather than be degraded by his touch. But oh, Phyllis! Phyllis! What can I tell you when I am home again?"

Exhaustion was merged at length in sleep, broken only by fitful moments of waking when the train stopped at intervening stations on the way to London, and before the great city was awake, after waiting for more than an hour at Paddington station, lest she should startle the little household at Lockhart Cottages by a too early arrival, Dorothy made her way toward home.

So passed the wedding night of the Hon. Mrs. Darcy Derrick. And how her bridegroom passed his, Dorothy learned four days later, when in a London daily paper her eyes fell on the following item under the heading:

A MISSING BRIDE.

A mysterious affair is reported from Liskeard. A gamekeeper in the employ of Lord Trevorlyn in the early morning of Thursday had his attention drawn by his dog to the body of a well-dressed man lying under a hedge at the base of the railway embankment. On examination, the gamekeeper discovered that the man was not dead or even seriously injured, but only a good deal bruised and shaken, having lain there in a stunned condition for fully twelve hours. On being assisted to a house and attended by a doctor, the extraordinary fact was elicited that the gentleman, who is stated to be of high social position, but who is desirous of having his name kept out of the affair, was on his honeymoon journey to Penzance when, just as the train slowed down before Liskeard, a quarrel arose between him and his newly-married bride, who, in a fit of violent jealousy, endeavored to throw herself out of the train. In trying to stop her, her husband missed his footing and fell, stunning himself with coming in contact with a stone in the steep descent. The strangest part of the occurrence is that the bride has disappeared, leaving no trace. It is, however, supposed that she has returned to her friends, who will, no doubt, persuade her to go

back to her husband, who, it is said, is willing and eager to forgive her."

On the following morning No. 4 Lockhart Cottages was empty and deserted, and a board advertising that the house was "to be let, furnished," stood by the garden gate.

CHAPTER XX.

A SHADOW ON THE WINDOW.

Fully four months after their sudden and mysterious "flitting," on a bitterly cold night in early January, the three women who formed the household of 4 Lockhart Cottages, crept back into their former home like mice to their hole.

For the one quarter Dorothy had been fortunate enough to let the place furnished, while she and Phyllis had remained in hiding at the house of a widowed sister of Creswell, who kept a tiny shop at Acton. But Phyllis was restless and longed to be back in their old home, and Dorothy, extremely anxious about her sister's health, wished to be near Dr. Morgan. Then, too, Creswell and her widowed sister constantly quarreled. The old servant, who was all unselfishness and devotion to her young mistress, was totally unable to get on with her own relations, who considered her "crabbed" and "faddy." A piece of luck, also, which had fallen in Dorothy's way, drew her back to the neighborhood of the Hammersmith road. An advertisement brought her into communication with an elderly lady writer, whose sight was bad and who required an amanuensis for several hours every evening, and as this person lived in one of the immense blocks of red brick flats contiguous to Lockhart Cottages and was prepared to pay twenty-five shillings a week for a secretary's service, Dorothy decided that, considering all the circumstances, it was time for them to make a move back to the

cottage, which had been empty since the Christmas quarter.

A little discreet "pumping" the next morning revealed the fact that a handsome young gentleman, very well dressed, had hung about the place immediately after their departure, and had made endless inquiries of the neighbors concerning the whereabouts of the Misses Knight.

He had even gone the length of calling for the key of the cottage on the landlord, who kept a shop in the Hammersmith road, and coming with him to view the place, asking questions all the time.

Dorothy shivered at the thought that their little home had been degraded by that man's evil presence; but she had foreseen some such move on the part of the Hon. Darcy, and had primed the landlord with the intelligence that his former lodgers had "gone abroad to reside with some relatives, and that they did not propose ever to return to England."

Having thus, as she supposed, permanently put him off the scent, she sincerely hoped that the Hon. Darcy would transfer his violent and evanescent passion for her to some other woman and trouble her no more.

Of that terrible honeymoon journey she could not bear to think, although it was sometimes forced before her in her dreams. Then, in an ecstasy of fear and hate, she would fancy she saw Darcy's pale face bending over hers in possessive triumph, or staring up at her with death in his glazing eyes, and she would wake, sobbing and screaming like a frightened child. Her own part in the adventure she especially dreaded to recall. The capability for passionate, murderous hate which she clearly possessed, alarmed and troubled her. While she shrank from dwelling upon this portion of her experience, she found herself making mental excuses for murderers and all such persons as were accused of crimes of violence.

Her father had been an extravagant, passionate man, who, in a fit of despair had shot himself; her mother, a foolish, impulsive creature, who had died from a chill caught by her own imprudence; and Shafto, their only son, was an admitted failure, intolerant in temper, rebellious against all constituted authority, a man who had disappeared from respectable society fully seven years ago.

"We come of a bad stock," Dorothy reflected. "And I myself shall most certainly kill Darcy Derrick if he forces his way again into my life or Phyllis'. I feel my teeth clench and my fists curl up at the mere thought of him, and at the sound of his voice a very demon of hate would, I know, take possession of me. That is the part I can't understand, for I have never willingly hurt anything alive. But I hate him all the more for making me feel so hateful!"

Dorothy's mind was essentially feminine, strong in intuition and weak in reason, and one of her distinguishing characteristics was a lofty disregard for the letter of the law. She had her own religion, and her own standard—in many ways a very high one—of right and wrong; but no possible course of reasoning could induce in her a respect for the majesty of the law, and the fact that she was legally Darcy Derrick's wife troubled her very little when once she thought herself secure from his interference, after throwing her wedding ring out of the window of the train on her way back to town.

That Darcy should claim her as his wife would ever appear to her an unnatural horror. In Dorothy's eyes he was her sister Phyllis' husband. He had deceived, disowned and deserted her, and broken her heart; but in Dorothy's eyes he was Phyllis' husband, whatever the law had to say on the subject.

Meantime, it was painfully evident that, married or single, Phyllis would never again be her old bright self.

Thin to emaciation, anaemic and nerveless, she lay all day on a sofa drawn close to the sitting-room fire, reading, or pretending to read, the novels with which Dorothy kept her supplied. Constant neuralgia and sleeplessness had begun to turn her hair gray, and, weeping bitter tears over her lost beauty, poor Phyllis went back to her golden hair-dye, which lent to her pallid cheeks and great, sunken, black-fringed eyes a peculiarly haggard and witch-like look. Often now in the evenings, when Dorothy, after a long day at painting small oil panels by the dozen, started for her night work at secretaryship, Phyllis would rise from her couch and would stealthily creep from the cottage, returning in about half-an-hour's time with dilated eyes and cheeks that were faintly flushed, to throw herself upon the sofa and fall into a heavy sleep.

Her temper, formerly sweet if a little capricious, grew daily more capricious and fretful. Unlike Dorothy in this, as in so many other things, Phyllis had what is called "no resources in herself." Lacking amusement, excitement and admiration, she had been subject to fits of intense depression even in past days of perfect physical health; but now that she was far too weak and ill to act, and could only brood over her ruined life and cruel wrongs, her melancholy became intensified until it bordered on insanity.

Dorothy understood her sister with the intuition of perfect love and sympathy. Phyllis had always been a little selfish and dependent upon others, and these qualities had become confirmed in her by Dorothy's entire unselfishness, as well as by her superior energy and intelligence. Throughout the chilly autumn and the fogs of early winter, Dorothy had worked from daybreak until bedtime, giving lessons in music and French and drawing to the children of Acton tradespeople, tinting photographs, tracing designs for fancy work, or copying manuscripts, until,

with swimming eyes and aching brain, she would fall asleep over her work.

Never once did she complain, never once did she let herself break down. Her heart was so torn with remorse for the terrible mistake she had made in her desire to serve her sister that she seemed unable to do enough for Phyllis in order to atone by her devotion for the miserable failure of her mission.

But of all that had befallen Dorothy during her two months' absence Phyllis knew absolutely nothing. Sometimes she tortured her sister by talking about Sergius Trevelyan; but this was chiefly after sleeplessness and neuralgia had clouded her brain, making her chatter of the past in a rapid and disconnected fashion. Her health was permanently broken, and Dorothy's heart seemed to contract in a very agony of pity as she watched her beloved sister grow daily thinner and paler, more silent and more sad.

There was no little luxury which Dorothy, by her unwearying devotion, did not contrive to provide for the invalid. Wine, fresh fruit and flowers, nourishing soups and tonics, the best medical advice; all of these things were obtained for Phyllis. Dorothy herself went underfed and ill-clad, and even poor Cresswell, who was a soft-hearted and selfless creature, existed chiefly on scraps of bread and cheese and potatoes, eaten at odd moments in the pantry; but Phyllis' appetite had to be tempted, and for Phyllis nothing was too dainty or too dear.

"You two are starving yourselves for me," Phyllis suddenly exclaimed one cold afternoon in the last week of February. "I know now, Dolly, why you pretend to have your dinner out; it is so that I shan't see how little you have to eat, while I am finding fault with the soups, and jellies, and birds you buy for me. Cresswell, you know what I say is true. I've seen you look quite pinched with

hunger on cold mornings. How selfish, how wickedly selfish, I have been to allow it!"

Cresswell's apron was at her eyes in a moment.

"It isn't me, Miss Phyllis, you ought to scold," she whimpered, "It's Miss Dorothy. Her boots are letting the snow in, and she won't eat nothing but dry bread when she comes home at half-past ten, when you're in bed; and even after that sometimes she sits up painting. Oh, it breaks my heart, that it does, to see you two that I've seen grow up in a great beautiful house and treated like young princesses, come down to work and starve like this! To think that I should remember you both, with your beautiful curly hair all combed and shining, driving off to the park every day with your poor mamma, and now her to be dead, and Miss Phyllis so ill, and Miss Dorothy working herself to death—oh, it's more than a body can bear!"

"Don't cry, you silly old thing, and don't chatter!" exclaimed Dorothy, starting up from her painting and giving an affectionate hug to Cresswell, before she gently pushed her from the room. Tears were in Dorothy's eyes, too, and a lump had risen in her throat. She could not bear to think of poor old Cresswell going without her dinner and perhaps even stinting herself in her favorite beverage, strong tea, thick and black as treacle. But she brushed her tears away before coming over to kneel by her sister's couch.

"Now, what put such an idea into your dear silly head?" she asked brightly. "Do I look as if I were starved? Why, I was never in better health in my life. And you, my darling, as soon as the weather gets a little bit warmer, you will feel so much stronger and happier. I will see if we can't manage to get away to the sea for a few days at Easter——"

Phyllis caught her sister's hands within her thin fingers and drew them against her heart.

"Don't dear!" she whispered. "Don't make plans for the future with me in them. And don't go without things any more that I may have them. I have been thinking only about myself and my sorrows and disappointments for a long time. But last night as I lay awake, I seemed suddenly to see things as they are, and I left off crying for myself to think about you. I know I have been dreadful in my temper lately, and have seemed ungrateful and unloving, but you don't know how difficult it is to be patient under that worrying pain in my head.

"And there is another reason why I have been irritable—a secret I have to confess to you, Dolly. For weeks past, when you have had to leave me in the evenings and I couldn't sleep, I hated to think, I have every now and then slipped out and bought some laudanum, a very little at a time, from one or two different chemists, and I have mixed it in some port and drunk it off, and for two or three hours I have been able to sleep. Even when I woke the pain seemed dulled, but all day long I have found myself growing more nervous, irritable and disagreeable. There, now I have confessed, Dolly dear; and you can prevent me from ever doing it again and take away the store of laudanum I have by me. I can't bear to think of deceiving you when you are half-killing yourself working for me. But do remember I am not strong like you, strong in character and in mind, I mean. I can't bear pain, or loneliness, or dullness, or horrid thoughts; and losing my prettiness makes me so miserable. And—Sergius must be fearfully wicked, I know—but do you think he would come and see me if he knew that I am dying?"

Tears were rolling down Dorothy's face as she raised it to her sister's.

"Don't think of him, my dearest," she murmured in a half-strangled voice, "I told you of the letter I saw—saying that he was in America—don't you remember?"

"But that was six months ago," said Phyllis, shaking her head. "I can't help thinking that he is in England now. When I die, you must not put 'Phyllis Knight' on my grave. You must remember that I have been his wife, and everybody knows it, not only you and Cresswell, but Nurse Rose and Dr. Morgan, and those theatrical people, and the people living about here. You must call me the wife of—ah! how stupid! I can't be Mrs. Sergius Trevelyan, for he told me that was an assumed name. Oh, I wish I knew his real name!"

"His name," said Dorothy, suddenly, "is the Hon. Darcy Derrick."

She could never tell by what impulse the words slipped out. Something in her sister's half-delirious anxiety hurt her, so that she was forced into saying what she knew. Phyllis raised herself on her arm and stared at her curiously.

"How did you find that out?" she asked.

"From a member of the company I played with. But now, darling, leave off thinking about him and about death and dreadful things. And tell me, does Dr. Morgan know of your habit of taking laudanum?"

"Yes. He got angry about it, and that's why I won't see him now. I am so glad I told you. I can't bear to think of there being secrets between us. The light's going and you are only trying your eyes, so don't go back to your painting. Stay where you are, until you start for Arundel Mansions, with your hands in mine, and your head on the cushion near me. If I know you are here I believe I can go to sleep, just as I used to when we were children and I had been naughty and told you all about it, and you had scolded me and kissed me and forgiven me."

With motherly tenderness Dorothy kissed her, and remained kneeling by her side in the gathering twilight. The fire touched both faces with a rosy outline, bringing

out clearly that structural likeness which in the light of day was sometimes lost. Beautiful, sensitive, feminine faces, full of capabilities for light-hearted gaiety and tender love, but shadowed in the forenoon of their freshness by anxiety and grief and ill-paid work and wearing pain.

At a quarter past seven Dorothy gently disengaged her hands from her sister's clasp and rose to her feet, stiff and cramped from remaining in one position so long. Phyllis was sleeping peacefully, tears on her long, dark eyelashes and a half-smile on her lips. Dorothy crept softly about the room, arranging her sister's medicine and books and flowers on a table close within her reach. Then, bending once more over Phyllis to listen to her regular breathing and ascertain that she wanted nothing, she left the room, took her hat and jacket from the hall and passed out through the little garden gate on her way to the neighboring red brick blocks called Arundel Mansions.

Cresswell locked the gate after her young mistress. Dorothy was most particular about having the gate kept securely locked at all hours of the day. Very few letters came for the little household, so that when, half an hour later, the postman, after knocking at the door of a neighboring cottage, rang three times with some impatience at the gate of No. 4, Cresswell experienced a feeling of natural annoyance.

"Why can't the silly fellow drop the letter into the box?" she asked herself as she slowly opened the front door and came down the path of the little garden. "Miss Dorothy had it put up a-purpose."

"Here, I can't keep waiting all night," the postman was saying. "A registered letter for Miss Dorothea Knight, 4 Lockhart Cottages, Hammersmith. That's right, ain't it? And you've got to sign a receipt."

Cresswell became, as she herself expressed it, "flustered." She fumbled with the key in the lock, and with

her spectacle-case in her pocket. Finally, after staring at the letter and turning it over in her hand, she pattered back to the house with it. She could not bear to wake Miss Phyllis, and she knew Miss Dorothy would be vexed with her for doing so. But anything in the way of clerical labor was a matter of extreme difficulty to Cresswell, and she did not feel equal to the situation.

So she stirred the fire loudly, and when Phyllis awoke with a start at the noise, she humbly asked her if she would mind signing that bit of paper for Miss Dorothy.

Phyllis did so, and examined the envelope with interest, while Cresswell returned the receipt to the postman, and wished him good-night, forgetting, in her excitement, as she had often before forgotten, to lock the garden gate.

"I feel certain it's good news," Phyllis said, as the old servant re-entered the sitting-room. "Cresswell, do you believe in presentiments? I have a presentiment that some wonderful good fortune is coming to us all, and that we are soon to throw off all our troubles and worries. Don't ask me how I know! I feel it in the air. Now, put this letter right in the middle of the table where Dorothy can't fail to see it as soon as she comes home, and then go and get me something to eat. And you must have something, too, with me. I haven't been able to eat all day, but now I am suddenly hungry. I am sure it means that something strange and delightful is going to happen. Hurry off, Cresswell dear, and you and I will have a little feast together."

The old servant hurried away, Phyllis moved to a sitting position, and bent her eyes, which had suddenly grown bright with hope, upon the glowing coals. The room was perfectly still and quiet, yet gradually a conviction crept over Phyllis that she was not alone, that some one was near her, watching her.

At first she remained motionless, her heart beating with

intermittent violence. Then slowly she turned her head and met, as she knew she would meet, the fixed stare of a man whose face was pressed close against the window from where he stood in the garden outside.

The light was almost gone; the face was different in many ways from that of the man she had once loved; but Phyllis knew him in a moment.

"Sergius!" she cried, springing to her feet, and swaying where she stood, with outstretched arms. "Sergius! You have come back!"

Her only answer was the sound of hurried footsteps in the garden path, and the swing of the gate as it shut behind him.

The man was gone.

She stood rooted to the spot. She longed to fly after him, to call his name, to appeal to him, perhaps even, so great is the gentleness of women who have loved, to pardon him. But she could not move. The words died on her cold lips, and a strange dizziness obscured her senses. She had forgotten Sergius, but she was lonely, and cold, and ill, and the room was dark, very dark.

At last: "Dorothy!" rang out her cry in a wail of appealing helplessness.

And at the cry and the sound of a heavy fall, Cresswell, hurrying in, found Phyllis stretched on the floor and across the fender, with the blood from a wound in her head, where she had struck it in falling, slowly creeping like a red snake round her throat.

She was dead.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WIDOWER'S LETTER.

The Hon. Darcy Derrick was destined to see and be seen that night by both the sister into whose lives he had brought so much perplexity and suffering.

Seated before a desk, her fair head bent over a pile of manuscript, upon which she was busily writing from dictation of a romance of the high-flown and sickly sentimental order, Dorothy had suddenly put down her pen and raised her head in the act of listening.

"Lady Madelaine bent her proud, white neck until her soft cheek was pillowed on Sir Ughtred's broad shoulder," dictated the little, old lady novelist.

Mechanically Dorothy tok up her pen, but she wrote not a word.

"You are not attending, Miss Knight!" exclaimed her employer. "Are you ill? What is the matter with you?"

Dorothy had sprung to her feet, pale and trembling.

"My sister wants me!" she murmured. "She is calling me!"

"Even if she is, you can't possibly hear her at this distance."

"I can hear her in my heart! Please excuse me—I am very sorry—but I must go to her!"

And swiftly, before the indignant little old lady had time to interfere, Miss Knight had flung down her pen, seized her hat and coat and darted down the stairs and out at the entrance door.

Right on the threshold she ran into a man who was standing there, hailing a passing hansom cab.

It was Darcy Derrick. She knew him, although she never paused for an instant in her flight, and although his back was turned toward her. She did not need his corroborating cry of "Dorothy!" as he recognized her flying figure and hurried in pursuit.

Her feet seemed to have wings. In a very few seconds she had darted through the garden gate of her home and turned the key in the lock before the Hon. Darcy had been able to reach it. Then, with a terrible fear at her heart, she entered the door of her home.

The Hon. Darcy Derrick hung about the neighborhood of Lockhart Cottages until nearly twelve o'clock, but he caught no further glimpse of either sister that night. What he did see was a spare, shabbily-dressed, elderly woman, who, at a little after ten o'clock, let herself out of the house and the garden gate, which last she this time remembered to lock after her.

The house of a certain Dr. Wentworth, in Kelman street, was Cresswell's goal, Dr. Wentworth having attended Phyllis on two occasions since the latter had quarreled with Dr. Morgan. Darcy waited until Cresswell had rung the doctor's bell, and then crept up and loitered near the door.

"Is Dr. Wentworth in?" Cresswell inquired, and then, before the servant could speak, she went on hurriedly: "Ask him to come at once without losing a minute. My mistress is dead, I'm afraid, but her sister won't believe it. For nearly two hours we've been trying to bring her round."

"If you step inside Dr. Wentworth will see you," the servant said, and the door closed upon them.

In a few minutes Darcy, who still waited, saw Cresswell come out, accompanied by the doctor, a tall, slight, light-haired man in the early thirties. He seemed to be questioning her closely, but Cresswell's answers were

given in so low a voice and were so broken by sobs that Darcy could not catch their import.

Mr. Derrick was in a state of the keenest excitement and anxiety. Was it possible, he asked himself, that either Dorothy or Phyllis could really be dead, just now when he had triumphantly run them to earth, after being thrown off the scent for so many months? There was no event he would consider more wholly desirable than the death of Phyllis, against whom he cherished the dull dislike which some men feel against the women they have most deeply injured. But the possible death of Dorothy was a very different matter, and at the mere idea of such an event Darcy trembled from head to foot. The feeling he entertained for Dorothy, which he was pleased to call love, was as strong as, if not stronger than, ever, and many events had occurred since that honeymoon journey to render a reconciliation with her not only desirable, but of vital importance.

The one and only obstacle which stood in the way of his perfect married happiness with Dorothy was, so Darcy decided, the existence of her sister Phyllis. His vanity was so inordinate and it had been so fostered by easy conquests among women, that he really believed he could speedily transform Dorothy's dislike against him, which he characterized as hysterical, into a no less passionate regard, and he was as inconsolable for her loss and as strenuously determined to regain her as though she had been the most devoted of wives.

"After all," he told himself, as he waited outside the sister's home during Dr. Wentworth's visit, "it cannot be either Dorothy or Phyllis who is dead. Three hours ago I saw them both. Phyllis sprang from her seat in delight and stretched out her arms at sight of me, and Dorothy darted past me on her way home. They were both tall, strong, and perfectly healthy women. Doubtless the

two of them have gone on talking about me every day all these months, comparing notes, and finding out just in what details the Hon. Darcy Derrick resembled and differed from Sergius Trevelyan. But, once I get Dorothy back, I must put a stop to these meetings and get rid of Phyllis, somehow. Put her on the stage again—that will be the best way—and get some budding tragedian at thirty shillings a week to marry her and keep her quiet, mixing his grease-paints and darning his silk tights. Then my beautiful half-tamed Dorothy and I will shake the dust of sordid England off our feet and set sail for sunny climes together.”

Meantime, Dr. Wentworth, after a visit of nearly half an hour's duration, came at length from his patient's house, followed by Cresswell, who, still weeping, fastened the gate after him.

“I will call and see your mistress again in the morning,” were his parting words to the old servant, “and you must really try to keep up, that you may look after her.”

Darcy heard, and was relieved in mind. Of course, the death of Phyllis was eminently desirable; but, on the other hand, the death of Dorothy would have been such an intolerable misfortune that it was better that both sisters should remain alive.

On the morrow it was most important that he should see Dorothy as early as possible, and with this end in view the Hon. Darcy took a room for the night at a hotel in the Hammersmith road, less than a quarter of a mile distant from Lockhart Cottages.

Before eight o'clock on the following Sunday morning he was again in sight of the little, green gate. All the blinds of the house were down, and he was telling himself that the inmates must be late risers, when one of a group of women, who were gathered gossiping round the door of the sweep's house opposite, approached him.

"Are you a-wanting one of them young ladies as lives in that 'ouse?" she inquired.

"Yes," he answered, bestowing one of his sweetest smiles on the questioner. She was forty-five and took in washing, but she colored high with pleasure and drew down her rolled-up sleeves. "They are old friends and relatives of mine," he went on, "and I am anxious to know how they are."

"I'm afaraid you've come at a bad time," the woman said; "one of the young ladies died suddenly last night, so they're saying."

"One of them! Which one?" he faltered, growing pale to the lips.

"Bless me, sir, you do look bad! And as to which it is, I can't rightly say. They're that alike I never could tell one from the other, and though they've lived here a good while they've been so quiet and so kep' themselves to themselves you've 'ardly known they was there. But you ring, sir, and ask that old servant of theirs what's happened. She's a very close, stock-up, old body; but in the case of a gentleman like you, and a relative, too, she's bound to tell you the truth."

Darcy thanked her, hesitated a moment, and then, with trembling hand, pulled the bell by the gate of No. 4.

There was a delay of some minutes before his ring was answered. Dorothy's eyes had fallen on him from an upper window, and had remained fixed upon him in fascinated horror. There stood her sister's murderer, and on the bed, by which she herself had knelt all night in tearless agony, lay his victim, with quiet face and still, cold hands.

Meeting Darcy, as she had done, close to the cottage on the preceding evening, Dorothy had no doubt at all that it was the shock of seeing him which had killed her sister. It was the one thing needed to complete the full

sum of her reckoning against him—a score which he could hardly pay with his life.

“Oh, heaven, punish him for me!” burst from her lips as she fell on her knees by her dead sister’s feet. “Punish him, I pray, for all the evil that he did against my poor, dead darling! Make him suffer as she suffered, make him despised, hated and known for the thing he is! And, above all, take him from my sight—let me not see him, lest I should be tempted to kill him!”

Passionate tears burst from her eyes, the first tears she had shed since that terrible home-coming of the previous evening. The memory of her sister’s ruined life and the swift tragedy of her death worked like madness in her brain. If heaven were just, that man should be made to suffer for his sins, and yet how could heaven be just and Phyllis be dead?

She was still crouched at the foot of the bed, her frame shaken by sobs, when Cresswell entered the room.

“There’s a gentleman ringing at the gate, Miss Dorothy,” she said timidly. “A tall, fair young gentleman. Am I to answer it?”

“Yes!” cried Dorothy, springing up with a fierce light in her eyes. “Go to the gate, and if he questions you, tell him that his wife is dead, Mrs. Darcy Derrick.”

“Do you know what you are saying, Miss?” Cresswell asked, frightened by Dorothy’s wild looks. “Poor Miss Phyllis——”

“Was Mrs. Darcy Derrick—that man’s wife! Go and tell him that she is dead!”

Puzzled, troubled, and very ill at ease, Cresswell made her way to the gate. Her late mistress had, so she knew, been cruelly deceived and deserted by some desperately wicked man. But Cresswell had understood his name to be Trevelyan, and now that this other name was suddenly announced to her for the first time, and she was

sent to face the villain in question, her knees trembled with alarm and indignation.

Darcy on his part saw a little, elderly woman, very pale and red-eyed, but, as it seemed to him, of set, stern cast of features and expression.

"What do you want?" she asked sharply, without opening the gate.

"I want my wife," he answered boldly. "Mrs. Darcy Derrick."

"Your wife, Mrs. Darcy Derrick, died at half-past eight yesterday evening," Cresswell answered, repeating the words as a lesson.

Darcy's forehead grew wet with agitation and excitement. Twice he tried to speak, but his throat was so dry he could not at first form the words.

"It is impossible!" burst from him at last. "I can't, I won't, believe it! I can't stand talking here with all these people about. Let me in, Cresswell; I have a great deal to say to you. I know all about you. You must let me in. I have a right to come."

"I know nothing about that, sir. I have no orders to admit you."

"Did Miss Knight send you to me?"

"Yes."

"Look here, Cresswell, I don't want to see Miss Knight. I have nothing to say to her. But you must let me see my wife or I will never believe she is dead."

"If you don't believe that you had better ask the doctor," retorted Cresswell, and before he could speak again she turned her back on him and regained the house.

The Hon. Darcy made his way at once to the house of Dr. Wentworth, but the doctor being out on his rounds his visitor had to wait two hours before his return. In the meantime the doctor had called at Lockhart Cottages and had clearly heard there something unfavorable to

Mr. Darcy Derrick, for he greeted the latter with marked coldness, and did not even ask him to sit down.

"You must forgive me for troubling you," Darcy began; "but the report has reached me that my dear wife was a patient of yours, and that she is now lying dead at 4 Lockhart Cottages."

"Is this your name?" Dr. Wentworth asked, pointing to the card Darcy had given him.

"Yes."

"Then you have heard aright. A lady, whom I now know to be the Hon. Mrs. Darcy Derrick, died at that address last night."

"My poor darling!" exclaimed Darcy, breaking down altogether in a fit of uncontrollable grief. Tears rushed from his eyes and he sank on a chair, burying his face in his hands.

The doctor watched him for a few seconds with rather a sarcastic expression. Having beheld Dorothy's grief, he was but little touched by Darcy's.

"If you will pardon me," he said, looking at his watch, "I have so many appointments to-day——"

"One moment, doctor! What was the cause of my poor wife's death?"

"Failure of the heart's action."

"I must see her!" cried Darcy, springing from his seat and beginning to pace wildly about the room. "You can have no idea how I loved her. We have been cruelly separated through the wicked schemes of her sister, who was jealous of her. I only lived to be reconciled to her, and now she has been snatched away from me by death! Do you think her end was hastened in any way?—do you think that it was all the result of an accident?"

"I do not understand you, sir. Your wife is dead, and I have told you the cause of her death. Your private

affairs, if you will pardon me for saying so, do not concern me."

With that Dr. Wentworth rang the bell for a servant to show Mr. Derrick to the door.

Still in a state of hysterical excitement, the Hon. Darcy repaired to the hotel where he had spent the preceding evening, and at once ordered a bottle of whiskey, a siphon of soda, and pens, ink and paper.

Phyllis should know what he thought of her before another hour went by, and, under the combined influence of grief, rage, baffled love, venomous spite and repeated application to the spirit bottle, he indited the following letter to his supposed sister-in-law:

"PHYLLIS: No doubt you think you triumph now that your sister, my beautiful Dorothy—my wife, and the only woman I have ever truly loved—is dead and cold. In your bitter, crazy jealousy, you will not even let me see her face again, knowing, as you must do, that I love her dead body a million times better than I could ever care for you living. But for you and your evil influence, Dorothy and I would have been happy together all these months. She was meant for me, put into the world for me, and but for you coming, like a poor, faded ghost of her, between us, we should have been together now, as we ought to be. I only cared to look at you because of your likeness to her, for I worshipped her from her portraits long before I saw her, and you were jealous even of them. You may, perhaps, in your wretched, insane infatuation for me, be hugging to yourself the thought that now that my wife is dead I may let you take her place. But in this you are utterly mistaken. Long ago I wearied of the sight of you, and now I absolutely hate you. Nothing shall ever induce me to look at you again. Don't attempt to hold any communication

with me—I repudiate you altogether. I never loved you, you have no claim upon me at all, and I don't care what becomes of you. I found you out solely through my deep, my passionate and unalterable love for my wife Dorothy—love so intense that wherever she went I had to follow her. Had she lived I would have won her back to me though all the forces of heaven and hell stood between us. But now that she is dead I shall only stop in this neighborhood long enough to follow her to the grave, wherein all my hopes of happiness will be buried with her. From that dark moment you need never hope to see or hear from me again. DARCY DERRICK.”

CHAPTER XXII.

GOOD NEWS THAT CAME TOO LATE.

The Hon. Darcy called again at Lockhart Cottages that day. It being Sunday, he wished to deliver his letter in person.

Cresswell took it from him without a word and carried it upstairs to her mistress. As she passed the open door of the darkened dining-room her eyes fell upon a letter which lay unopened upon the table. It was the registered communication for which Phyllis had signed the receipt on the preceding evening. Cresswell's tears broke out afresh at sight of it, but she resolved to give it to Dorothy on the chance that it possibly contained news which might divert her thoughts from her overwhelming grief.

"That dreadful man who came this morning, miss, has been again and has brought a letter for you. And here's a registered letter that came yesterday evening after you had left. I'd forgotten all about it in our trouble."

Dorothy, who had never left her sister's room, and could not be induced to take sleep or food since Phyllis' death, listlessly held out her hand for the letters. It was late in the afternoon, and her head ached with long weeping and fasting. She read Darcy Derrick's letter through with an expression of bewilderment, which finally changed to one of relief.

"He thinks it is I, and not Phyllis, who is dead," she said to herself, wonderingly.

In truth, it had not occurred to her that he would take

her message, or her subsequent announcement of her sister's married name to Dr. Wentworth, in that spirit. The suddenness of her loss had stunned her faculties; she had not stopped to reflect that Mr. Derrick had no means of ascertaining which of the sisters was dead. She pre-supposed that he knew it was Phyllis and she imagined that he would take the message as coming from her (Dorothy) in the defiant spirit in which she had framed it.

But as she re-read Darcy's letter a new thought came into her mind. Had not he himself by his mistake opened out to her a new way of escape from him? Tears of thankfulness gushed from her eyes as she gazed from the open sheet in her hand to her sister's face, calm in the peaceful dignity of death. That gentle heart could never again be wounded by Darcy's cruelty, nor could his bitterest taunts have any more power to cause her tears to flow.

The beauty of her early girlhood had come back to Phyllis' face, ennobled by Death's first idealizing touch. Very mean and small and petty, of the world worldly, and torn by a thousand distracting emotions, Dorothy felt herself to be before her, and she who had petted and protected Phyllis in her lifetime felt strangely awed and reverent in the presence of Phyllis dead.

"Thank God, she never read this letter!" Dorothy whispered to herself, gushing hot with anger for the insults which Darcy addressed to the woman who had so loved him. "If only I can contrive not to undeceive him! He seems almost as anxious not to see Phyllis as I am not to see him. If he thinks I am Phyllis he will avoid me, and I shall at least escape the sin of murder, for if I see him and if he should speak to me or try to touch me I feel I must kill him! If he were to find out the truth, he has sworn he will never rest from follow-

ing me, and I know he would keep his word. He has hunted us down already, and he would do so again. No one has seen my dear Phyllis since last night except Cresswell and Dr. Wentworth. Cresswell will say what I tell her, and Dr. Wentworth knows Phyllis as Mrs. Darcy Derrick. I gave my word to Phyllis long ago that she should be buried as a married woman in her husband's name. This wretch who ruined her life says he will follow his wife's body to the grave; well, then, he shall do so, and Phyllis shall be buried as Mrs. Darcy Derrick. Afterward, I will instantly leave this place with Cresswell, and we will find very quiet, very cheap, rooms somewhere, anywhere, so that I am not likely to meet that horribly cruel madman who calls himself my husband."

This decision in some sort modified the intensity of Dorothy's grief, as any practical resolve necessarily relieves the strain on an essentially active mind. She read Darcy's letter carefully through a third time, and then proceeded as carefully to destroy it and to wash her fingers after touching anything his hands had touched. Not until after this task did she remember the registered letter to "Miss Dorothea Knight," for which a receipt had been given in her absence by Phyllis on the preceding evening.

The senders were a firm of solicitors, Messrs. Searle & Glyn, and their office address, printed on the notepaper, was in Buckingham street, Strand.

"Madam," the lawyers wrote. "In pursuance of our desire to carry out the testamentary intentions of our late client, Mrs. Julius Knight, of 37 Belvedere Gardens, Hyde Park, we have recently inserted advertisements in the London papers with a view to obtaining your address. This, however, we failed to do until yesterday, when a gentleman, who gave his name as the Hon. Darcy

Derrick, Lord Derrick's brother, called at our office and informed us, first, that he had married Miss Dorothea Knight at St. James Church, Plymouth, in September of last year, and, second, that family quarrels had parted him from his wife, to whom he was very deeply attached, but whose present address he had only just succeeded in discovering. We are, therefore, sending this letter, registered, to the address with which he furnished us, and, should this reach you, we must beg you to at once communicate with us at our office.

"Mr. Derrick informed us that he had reason to believe that your present circumstances were somewhat straitened, and that you would be more likely to give our representative an interview if you knew the nature of the business upon which we wish to confer with you. We have much pleasure, therefore, in informing you that by the will of our late client, Mrs. Julius Knight, the great bulk of her property, including the freehold residence at 37 Belvedere Gardens, with furniture, plate, horses and carriages, a collection of valuable jewelry and investments yielding an income of ten thousand pounds yearly, is left unconditionally to her grand-niece and god-child, Dorothea Knight, orphan daughter of the late Harold Everett Knight, formerly of Petersham Lodge and the Stock Exchange."

Dorothy put down the letter and drew a deep breath.

So many things had happened since that Sunday afternoon in early summer when she had sought out her great-aunt in order to plead for Phyllis that she had almost forgotten the incident. Her aunt had said things against her sister, and she had retorted wrathfully, and had left the house. And now Aunt Dorothea had atoned in her own way for the pain she had caused her niece that afternoon. Hers had been such a vivacious, dominant personality that it was difficult to think of her as dead; a

kind-hearted, hot-tempered, autocratic, spoiled woman, proud of her full-blown charms, which she had retained late in life, proud of her diamonds and all that was hers, and, above all, proud of her dinners, and revelling in the triumphs of her chef's skill.

She had been touched, deeply touched, Dorothy remembered, by the tale of Phyllis' starving on Richmond Bridge, though she had but little sympathy for the story of her betrayal. And now both aunt and niece were dead, and that money which might have prolonged Phyllis' life belonged to Dorothy, who could never spend one penny of it in making her sister happy.

"Too late! It has come too late!" sobbed Dorothy, her hot tears falling on Phyllis' ice-cold hands. "What can I buy for you now, my dear one, but the winter roses and lilies of the dead?"

The news of this fortune, coming when it did, seemed a bitter mockery. She reflected, too, that Darcy knew of it, and, to a ruined spendthrift such as he, a wife with a large income would offer irresistible attractions.

"He must never suspect it is I, Dorothy, who am alive, now," she said to herself. "I must hide myself until he is out of the neighborhood, and must then leave England at once with Cresswell, using Phyllis' name until I have put many miles of sea and land between us. I might even go to America, and try to find my brother Shafto. I know the firm to whom he was at first sent, and Shafto was always affectionate to me. It would be nice to find some one belonging to me—some one to protect me."

But very soon her thoughts wandered back to the many things she might have done for Phyllis, if only this money had come to her earlier. She was so accustomed to think for Phyllis, to work for Phyllis, to sacrifice herself daily and hourly for Phyllis, that now that Phyllis lay dead beyond all love and service, Dorothy's life seemed a blank,

and the fact that she was a rich woman served only to fill her with poignant regrets.

The violent emotions of the past twenty-four hours, coming as they did after four whole years of overwork of body and brain, had strained Dorothy's powers to the utmost, and she was now on the brink of a serious breakdown.

All need for working and striving had been suddenly taken away just at the moment when constant, enforced occupation might have proved a solace to her. She had nothing to do but to remain passive and conceal herself from the man she so feared and hated until such time as she could secretly leave England. There were no immediate duties to drive from her brain the thought of her sister's wrongs, her sister's sufferings, her blighted life, the cruel suddenness of her death.

When at length, worn out with grief, she lay down on her bed to sleep, a sort of vertigo possessed her mind.

Hour after hour she fancied that she was endeavoring to escape with Phyllis from an exaggerated and monstrous Darcy Derrick, looming behind them, diabolical in form and power. And as his shadow neared them, Phyllis' warm hand would turn to coldest clay within Dorothy's protecting clasp, her heart would gradually cease to beat, and when, in an agony of terror, Dorothy seized her in her arms, it was a corpse, and not a living woman she held there.

Through the semi-delirium of that terrible night, one only ray of hope shone through the thick cloud of her fevered imaginings. Sometimes, as she and Phyllis were about to fall into the clutches of their enemy, a strong man's hand would seize both hers and draw her out beyond Darcy's reach. The form and features of this Perseus of dreamland were blurred and indistinct; but when at one point she strained to see his face, she knew

it instantly for that of Aylmer Read, her friend of the old Museum student days.

Early the next morning Dr. Wentworth called, to find Dorothy with dry, hot lips, aching head, and ice-cold hands and feet.

She was not ill, she declared; there was nothing the matter with her. He might ask Cresswell; Cresswell would tell him she had never been ill in her life—she was only afraid lest that dreadful man should get hold of her.

"You are sure he didn't come in with you?" she cried, starting up in bed with scared eyes. "He is so cunning and wicked one can't escape from him. He killed my sister. You know that, don't you, Dr. Wentworth? Didn't I tell you?"

The surprise in his face seemed to restore her mental balance. Blushing deeply, she fell back on the pillows again.

"Please forgive me if I have been talking nonsense," she said humbly. "I have had bad dreams all night, and don't seem to be out of them yet, and I feel weak and strange."

"You have had nothing to eat since the day before yesterday, which is quite enough to account for it," Dr. Wentworth said. "I want to know whether I can be of any use to you—about your sister's funeral, I mean. I have spoken to Mrs. Cresswell, and she seems utterly helpless; indeed, she scarcely seems to know your sister's name. You are not in a fit state to get out of bed, and I'm afraid you won't be for some days. But if you will kindly furnish me with a few necessary particulars I will take all the worry of the affair off your hands. All you have to do is to tell me Mrs. Darcy Derrick's full name and age; that is all I want to know."

Dorothy lay silent for a few seconds.

Then she said in constrained tones:

"Mrs. Darcy Derrick's maiden name was Dorothea Knight, and her age now would be twenty-one."

Dr. Wentworth took down her words, and later on left the house, promising to call again toward evening, and insisting upon absolute rest and quiet for his patient. Before his second visit, however, an event had occurred which did away with all possibility of that calm repose upon the necessity for which he had so strongly dwelt. This was the arrival of a second letter from the solicitors, Messrs. Searle & Glyn, brought to Lockhart Cottages by a messenger, who had received instructions to wait for an answer.

The lawyers wrote :

"Madam—Mr. Darcy Derrick called at our office at ten o'clock this morning with the unexpected and distressing intelligence that his wife, our client, Miss Dorothea Knight, or, to style her aright, Mrs. Darcy Derrick, died very suddenly at Lockhart Cottages on Saturday evening last at half-past eight o'clock. Mr. Derrick furnished us with the name of the doctor who attended her, and an exchange of telegrams with him has confirmed the sad intelligence. Mr. Derrick is desirous of attending his late wife's funeral, and we should wish a representative of our firm to be present on the occasion. Dr. Wentworth's telegram informs us that you are prostrate with grief and seriously ill. But if you will kindly dictate a few words and dispatch them by the bearer of this letter, giving us the particulars as to the date and place of your sister's interment, you would be conferring a great favor upon your obedient servants,

"SEARLE & GLYN.

"To Miss Phyllis Knight."

Something of the power of the law in its cold, passion-

less, judicial aspect impressed itself upon Dorothy as she read the letter.

A lie once spoken in hot defiance, with no intention to deceive, had been taken as a truth, and she found herself forced to stand by it.

Suppose she were to send for these lawyers and explain to them the mistake that had been made, to tell the whole truth to them, what would be the result?

Darcy Derrick would attend the funeral, would see that the dead woman was buried as Phyllis Knight, would disclaim all relationship with her, and cast a foul slur upon her memory and name. He would triumph in his victim's death, and before the grass had grown above her grave would be subjecting her sister to his gross and intolerable persecutions, urged by the double force of his evil passion and his desire to get her fortune.

The law would take no count of Phyllis' ruined life and tragic death. Had Darcy married her legally, he could not have wedded her sister; but as the law would set aside a marriage contracted during the first Mrs. Derrick's lifetime, he was perfectly free to claim Dorothy as his lawful wife.

Her heart was filled with hatred against him, with horror of him, and with dread of the violence of her own feelings should he so much as enter her presence.

And yet, so long as he believed her alive, she could never for one moment be free from him.

Every one would be against her. She fancied she could hear the stereotyped old phrases which would be used: "A wife's place is at her husband's side;" "No one should come between man and wife;" "A wife's best shelter is her husband's love;" "Whom God hath joined," etc., etc.

She knew, in brief, just what would happen if this mistake were made right, and with every nerve in her

body quivering with terror and disgust at the thought of this man's claim upon her, she sprang from her bed, resolved, whether it were fraudulent or not, to go through with this deception.

"Tell the messenger," she called to Cresswell, "to wait. And please go round to Dr. Wentworth and ask him to come to me at once."

The doctor found her flushed and strangely bright about the eyes, with the temperature of fever, but in manner perfectly calm and sane.

"I want you to tell me about the funeral," she said; "a messenger is waiting to know what is arranged."

A few minutes later Messrs. Searle & Glyn's emissary set out on his return journey, bearing a short note written by Dr. Wentworth at Dorothy's dictation, she having said that she was too weak to hold a pen.

"Miss Knight thanks Messrs. Searle & Glyn for their letter, and informs them that the funeral of her sister, Mrs. Darcy Derrick, will start from this address for Brompton Cemetery at twelve o'clock (noon) to-morrow (Tuesday).

The state of unnatural excitement in which he found his patient alarmed Dr. Wentworth, and he began to strongly dissuade her against attending her sister's funeral. Rather to his surprise, she at once yielded to his suggestion that she should stay in bed for a day.

"I will tell you frankly, Dr. Wentworth," she said, "I do not wish to meet my sister's husband. If you think I am ill and feverish now, I can assure you that the mere sight of him would make me a thousand times worse. I loved my sister beyond everything in the world, and that man's treatment of her was so unutterably cruel as to be hardly human."

Tears rolled down her face as she spoke in tones of deep earnestness that carried conviction to her hearer.

"Mr. Derrick must be a consummate hypocrite," he observed thoughtfully. "In speaking of his late wife he employed terms of the wildest and most extravagant affection. He assured me he could not live without her, and cried like a child at the mention of her name."

"That is because she had just come into some property, and he knew it," Miss Knight said, scornfully.

Dr. Wentworth listened and wondered; but he had many calls upon his time, and very shortly afterward took leave, after prescribing a sedative and a sleeping draught for his beautiful and excitable patient.

Dorothy lay still for some little while after his departure; but there was something more to be done, and done instantly; and, flinging on her dressing-gown again, she went to the head of the stairs and called Cresswell softly, as one instinctively calls in the house where the dead are lying.

The old servant entered, pale, red-eyed, a little hurt and on her dignity in that she had not been consulted or even informed about the funeral.

"Cresswell, dear," Dorothy began, putting her hands on her shoulders, "I have something very, very important to say to you. For my dear sister's sake, and for my sake, you must join me in something which looks like deception, but which we must carry through for a few days. Listen, and don't cry. It is nothing very dreadful. You remember our great-aunt, Mrs. Julius Knight? Her lawyers have written to tell me that she is dead, and that she has left me a large fortune; so that we shall not be poor any more. But some other very wicked people—that man Mr. Darcy Derrick, whom you saw—will try to get the money and to persecute me for it; and the only way by which I can escape is to pretend that it is I, Dorothy, lying dead, and that I, whom you now see, am Phyllis. I see you can't understand, and it

is impossible for me to explain to you more fully. But you have always done all that I have asked you, and I am sure that you will do this. All you have to do is to say, if you are asked, that it is Miss Dorothy, the elder sister, who is dead, and that I am the younger, Miss Phyllis."

"But it's all such a mystery!" gasped Cresswell, bewildered. "First Miss Phyllis calls herself Mrs. Trevelyan; then a young gentleman says she's his wife, and that he's called Derrick; then I am to say you are her, and I'm kept in the dark about everything all the time, just as if I was a baby."

"Now, don't be cross and tiresome, Cresswell, dear; you don't know how much depends on this. I will, perhaps, tell you all my reasons some day, but I can't now. And it's only for a day or two. We will go away together, you and I, right out of England, and when once we are in another country I will take my own name again. Only, when people ask you my name, remember it's Phyllis, and I am twenty years old. And Dorothy is dead!"

"But the people about here who have seen you both won't believe me," said Cresswell, struck by a sudden inspiration. "Poor Miss Phyllis was taller than you, and then look at the difference in your hair!"

"I can cut mine off and dye it, just like hers," said Dorothy. As she spoke she ran to the dressing-table, and before Cresswell had time to expostulate, snip, snip, went the scissors, and a shower of sunny, brown locks slipped from her shoulders on to the floor.

"I can wear much higher heels and a thick veil," she said, as she went on hurriedly with her task. "And I will use that stuff for my hair that my poor darling used. And now that I am so much thinner you will be hardly able to know me from her."

Her rapidity and impulsiveness took Cresswell's breath away, but she wept afresh at the sight of the short curls on the floor.

"I've always been so proud of your lovely hair!" she sobbed, as she dropped on her knees to collect it. "It do seem like the end of everything."

"It will grow again, you dear, silly, old thing," cried Dorothy, snipping away the more impetuously that she disliked these small subterfuges, and would gladly have avoided them.

But at noon next day her reward came, when, looking out from behind the blind in her bedroom, she saw her sister borne to her last resting place under the name of "Mrs. Darcy Derrick," and followed, weeping to her grave, by the man who had betrayed her.

"Dearest, I kept my word to you. Thank God for that!" she murmured as, breaking down altogether, she sobbed her heart out kneeling by the bed where the dead had lain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOROTHY'S CRIME.

The day following Phyllis' funeral found Dorothy in a state of utter prostration.

All her bravery and determination seemed to have left her. She lay nerveless and still, scarcely listening while the doctor told her she ought to leave her present surroundings as soon as she felt strong enough to move.

"I am going to leave England," she said at last, "almost immediately. I shall go to America or Australia."

"You are certainly not in a fit condition to undertake a long journey at present," the doctor observed. "Change of scene you need imperatively, but I should advise, if possible, some place within easy driving distance for a day or two, in order to recruit your strength a little. In your present state of nerves a long journey by rail might be most injurious. If you have any relatives living within driving distance——"

"I have none," she said, interrupting him almost fiercely. "No relatives and no friends. But I have money and will do as you say."

"Why has your mistress cut off her hair?" the doctor asked Cresswell before he left the house. "She looked so like her dead sister with her white face and short hair that when I entered the room I was absolutely startled."

"It made her head hot so that she couldn't sleep at night," Cresswell explained rather lamely.

Cresswell liked the idea of deceiving him and everybody as to the identity of the sisters.

Secretive and taciturn by temperament, she enjoyed anything in the nature of a mystery as keenly as do all her class, and the notion of a plot, of however innocent a kind, between her mistress and herself, gave a zest to life under which her spirits revived wonderfully.

Half an hour later Dorothy called her to her bedside again.

"We will go and stay for a few days at your brother's cottage near Ham Common," Miss Knight said. "I have been thinking it all over, and it is just the place for us. I know when we lived at our old home I often used to think that if any one wanted to hide, that cottage in the nursery garden, hidden among tall trees, would be an ideal retreat. I shall soon get strong again there, and we can drive all the way down. But first of all I must get some of my money from those lawyer people."

And here a difficulty presented itself. Cresswell detested writing and could only with great difficulty be induced to sign her own name. Dorothy's handwriting was altogether unlike that of her sister, and it was quite possible that Darcy Derrick, who appeared to be constantly holding communication with Messrs. Searle and Glyn, might contrive to see any letter she wrote and at once discover the deception that was being practiced upon him. Dorothy felt faint with apprehension at the thought.

"Do you know any one who could do a little writing for me, at my dictation, Cresswell?" she asked. "I know it's of no use asking you, and I feel too weak to sit up yet, or there will be no hope of leaving here."

The daughter of the laundress, who lived in the neighboring North End road, was, so Cresswell asserted, a beautiful writer, and she was forthwith dispatched in search of her, while Dorothy lay with closed eyes thinking over the wording of her appeal.

But this particular letter was never fated to be written.

The door had scarcely closed on Cresswell when the postman brought a letter for "Miss Phyllis Knight," in the envelope and writing with which Dorothy was now familiar as coming from the office of Messrs. Searle and Glyn.

Anxiety made her rise and creep feebly down the stairs and the little garden path to the green gate, and the same feeling prompted her to tear open the envelope before she reached the house door. But at the sight of the first words every trace of color left her cheek; she stumbled rather than walked into the hall, and pushing open the door of the little parlor, fell, trembling and unnerved, on a chair.

The lawyer wrote:

Madame.—Will you kindly inform us, if possible by return post, whether your sister, the late Mrs. Dorothea Derrick, left anything in the nature of a will? As you are no doubt aware, the large fortune left to her by our client, Mrs. Julius Knight, will, if your sister has died intestate, become the sole property of her husband, the Hon. Darcy Derrick.

The paper fell from Dorothy's hands to the ground. There on that same sofa where the two sisters had sat locked in one another's arms on that terrible night when Phyllis had sobbed out the story of her cruel desertion and betrayal, Dorothy was seated as she learned that, by her own action in confusing her identity with that of Phyllis, the man who had brought about her sister's death was to succeed through that event to the bulk of her aunt's fortune.

Dorothy's brain reeled at the thought. There was no one in the whole world to whom she could turn for advice; she knew nothing of the law, she was alone in the house, she was pitifully weak and even a little light-headed as a result of long weeping, sleeplessness and fasting. But she had to pit her woman's ingenuity against this

monstrous injustice of the law, as it appeared to her, and her old indomitable spirit urged her to be equal to the occasion.

Only one alternative presented itself before her fevered brain. Dorothy was supposed to have died intestate, but she, Dorothy, to whom the money was left, was alive, and could assign it to whom she pleased.

She knew how to make a will, or at least she knew where to put her hand on a book of the "Universal Inquirer" order, which would furnish her with the necessary information.

With nervous haste she sought the book in question, and hurriedly turned the pages until she found the desired information. Then, sitting down before her desk, she proceeded to write with a shaking hand on a sheet of ruled foolscap:

"This is the last will and testament of Mrs. Dorothea Derrick, formerly Miss Dorothea Knight, of No. four Lockhart Cottages, Severn road, Hammersmith, London. I hereby give, devise and bequeath to my sister, Phyllis Knight, her heirs, executors and administrators, for her and their own use and benefit absolutely and forever, all my estate and effects both real and personal, whatsoever and wheresoever, and of what nature and quality soever; and I hereby appoint her, the said Phyllis Knight, sole executrix of this my will. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand this——"

Dorothy stopped. It was now Wednesday, the twenty-seventh day of February. Phyllis had died on Saturday, the twenty-third, and her death had been registered in her sister's name two days later. Clearly the date must be falsified, and seizing her pen again, Dorothy boldly ante-dated her will by one whole month.

"I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-seventh day of January, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-four."

All doubt as to the witnesses for the signature was set at rest by the arrival at that exact moment of Cresswell at the little green garden gate, accompanied by Emma Huddleston, the laundress's daughter from the North End road.

This Emma seemed specially suitable for Dorothy's purpose. She knew neither of the Misses Knight by sight, and was a tall, lank, pallid girl, of vacant face and shy, awkward manners. The blind was still lowered in the little parlor, and all the light that penetrated there came through the space intervening on each side between the narrow blind and the woodwork of the window.

Emma Huddleston saw but imperfectly, coming as she did from the clear sunlight, the figure of a lady in deep mourning—a lady who seemed preternaturally tall and thin and pale and sad, and who wore her hair cut short as a boy's. The lady's voice was wonderfully sweet, but her manner was somewhat abrupt and peremptory as she asked Emma to affix her name and address at the foot of a sheet of paper which she pushed toward her.

The paper had blue lines, and apparently contained writing; but it was carefully folded so that only a blank space was offered for Miss Huddleston's inspection.

"I am leaving this house," the lady explained hurriedly, "and I have been making a list of everything in it. I want it to seem legal, and so I propose to get you to write your names as witnesses to my signature—you and Cresswell. Will you do that? I will give you half a crown for your trouble."

"Yes, miss; thank you. Will you write first."

Dorothy took the pen, hesitated a moment, and then, in a large, clear handwriting, affixed her signature:

"Dorothea Derrick."

The name bore no meaning to the laundress's daughter, and she scarcely appeared to have noticed it as she took

the pen Dorothy handed to her and proceeded to inscribe slowly, in a careful, copperplate style: "Emma Amelia Victoria Huddleston," and her address in the North End road.

But during this process Cresswell was moved to extreme uneasiness. Miss Dorothy had turned herself into Miss Phyllis, Miss Phyllis that was dead had been called Mrs. Derrick, and here was Miss Dorothy apparently forgetting everything that had gone before and signing herself "Dorothea Derrick."

Cresswell looked at her mistress. Dorothy was deadly pale and her eyes blazed with suppressed excitement. Cresswell began to wonder whether grief had turned her brain.

"You've signed your sister's name, miss," she said at last in a hissing whisper.

Dorothy flushed angrily and made a warning gesture of silence. She hoped Emma had not noted the interruption, but Emma had raised her head and stared.

"You are right, Cresswell," Dorothy said for Emma's benefit. "I never have the thought of her out of my head, and so I put her name instead of mine. Never mind, write your name here as the second witness, and I will take the list away and alter the signature when my head aches less."

So Emma Huddleston received her half-crown and departed, and Dorothy, after dispatching Cresswell for sealing-wax, carefully fastened and sealed the long envelope into which she had placed the will, and wrote outside: "The last will and testament of Dorothea Derrick, commonly known as Dorothy Knight."

This she placed in her sister's desk among her letters and papers, and forthwith sat down to answer the lawyer's letter.

Mrs. Darcy Derrick, or, as she was usually called, Miss

Dorothy Knight, had certainly made a will, she informed Messrs. Searle and Glyn, and the said will was at the present moment securely lying, signed, sealed and witnessed, in the dead lady's desk. She herself, Phyllis Knight, was fully acquainted with the contents of the same will, and as she was now able to leave her bed, she would be very glad to see the lawer and place her sister's will in his hands, if he would call at Lockhart Cottages on the afternoon of the following day.

And Mr. Searle, the head of the firm, did call, to find, not the "silly little provincial actress" described to him by Mr. Derrick, but a young gentlewoman of extreme grace and beauty and appealing, tear-laden gray eyes. True, her short-cut hair was evidently dyed golden, as Darcy had said it would be, but there was no other trace of artificiality either in her appearance or her manner.

She spoke to him with some timidity and reserve, and while quick blushes chased each other over her delicate face, she briefly alluded to her sister's relations with her husband.

"I can't trust myself to speak of this Mr. Derrick," she said. "The subject is an intensely painful one. His treatment of my sister was cruel and bad beyond belief, and her illness and death are indirectly due to him. I must earnestly beg of you never to let him know my address or hold any communication with me. Dorothy's will was made solely to prevent any money she might have from falling into her husband's hands."

"But had she at the time any idea of inheriting any property?" Mr. Searle inquired, as he sat facing her at the table with the open will in his hand.

"Not the slightest. But she made money by teaching and painting. We had lived together all our lives, and loved each other very dearly."

Tears rolled down her face as she spoke. It was im-

possible to doubt the genuineness of her love for her dead sister, to which, indeed, even Darcy Derrick had testified.

The old lawyer was touched and interested. Already he had heard of the Quixotic generosity with which the sisters had sacrificed the little fortune which would have been theirs on their father's death in order to satisfy the just claims of his creditors. He was a wise old man and an excellent judge of character, and he knew much to the credit of the lovely, hardworking and unfortunate sisters, and a good deal to the discredit of Baron Derrick's son.

He therefore treated Dorothy with a gentle and fatherly kindness which quickly touched her and made her ashamed of the deception she was forced to practice upon him. He strongly approved of her plan to leave Lockhart Cottages immediately and stay in some quiet country spot not too far from London, to recruit her strength before undertaking a long sea voyage.

"But from what I heard from your late aunt about your brother, my dear young lady, I should scarcely advise you to seek him out. If he is your sole inducement for visiting America, I should say Australia would be a better goal. You must remember that you are now a lady of very considerable means, and it would be a great pity if they should be used to defray the extravagances of ne'er-do-weel relatives. Forgive my frankness."

"I am only too glad to have any one take an interest in me," she said simply, and Mr. Searle mentally decided that this young woman was as good as she was beautiful.

In ten days' time she was to return to town, if sufficiently strong, and to proceed to Messrs. Searle and Glyn's office, in order that they might arrange for the future disposal of her property. Meantime, she was to send them her address from the country, and to facilitate her immediate departure Mr. Searle offered to advance her

what money she required, pending the necessary legal proving of her claims.

"I shall be very glad, indeed, for I have hardly a shilling in the world," said his beautiful client.

And very early, very quietly, on the following morning, Dorothy and Cresswell, closely veiled and in deep mourning, made their way across the waste ground to where a four-wheeled cab was waiting to take them on the first stage of their journey. Each woman was armed with a few packages and parcels, but there was no heavy luggage in attendance to suggest that they were "flitting," and that Lockhart Cottages, their home during the space of nearly four years, would see their faces no more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AYLMER TO THE RESCUE.

It was past four o'clock on a foggy Friday afternoon in March, nine days after the sudden departure of Dorothy and Cresswell from Lockhart Cottages, as Aylmer Read, chief sub-editor of the Daily Post, left the Fleet street office of that journal with an unusually troubled and anxious expression on his handsome countenance.

"Phyllis Knight," he muttered to himself reflectively, pulling the ends of his yellow mustache. "There can hardly be two Phyllis Knights, both tall and gray-eyed and fair-haired, and formerly residing in the Hammersmith district. I wish to heaven I could contrive to communicate with her in some way. I always knew I should hear of her again, but I never thought it would be like this. By to-morrow morning she will have seen the warning—but there is always to-night, and the force are anxious to vindicate their character for intelligence after their fiasco in the *Monro* affair last month. Of course some terrible mistake has been made—but what a proud and sensitive nature such as hers, the shock and publicity will be cruelly hard to bear. And what in the world has become of that contemptible cur, her husband, *Sergius Trevelyan*?"

From which soliloquy it will be understood that during the eight months which had elapsed since he had last beheld her Aylmer Read had by no means forgotten the lady who had once been his fellow student in the British Museum sculpture galleries.

In a locked desk at his present home there lay two

dozen portraits of "Miss Phyllis Knight," which he had bought in the belief that they were meant to represent Dorothy, and had found singularly unflattering and unsatisfactory.

Not only were Dorothy's features more regularly beautiful than those of her unhappy sister, but in the soft, appealing prettiness of the latter there had been no trace of the force of character, the swift intelligence, or the passionate impulsiveness, which a close observer might have read in the face of the elder sister.

Very often in his leisure moments Aylmer Read had spread the twenty-four photographs out before him and had endeavored, for the most part vainly, to reconcile them with his memory of the sunny-haired girl, with the firmly-closed lips and changing gray eyes, whom he had chosen to set up in his heart as his ideal of womanhood.

Remembering her little scornful speeches, her avowed determination to dispense with the sentimental admiration of men, and that proud reserve of manner which was but a cloak for her natural girlish high spirits and a certain demure, dainty coquetry which characterized her, Aylmer had tried by the hour to trace in her many different photographs something of the personality which had so strongly attracted him. He found, however, in them nothing but a pretty woman, prettier in some than in others, a tender, clinging, gentle, creature, but never his "Diana the Disdainful" of the sculpture galleries, who had rippled into laughter over his bad drawing, had thawed into friendship on their last walk home from the Grassmarket Theatre, and who had from that moment disappeared so mysteriously from his ken.

He had even bought and studied theatrical papers, and had found and tracked the progress of more than one actress named Knight, and, among others, of a Dorothy of that ilk, who for a period of six weeks had played with

Mr. Darcy's "Love's Right" company, in various seaside towns during the preceding year. But there was nothing to lead him to connect Dorothy Knight with Phyllis Knight, or to teach him that the "Dorothea Knight, aged twenty-one, orphan daughter of Harold Everett Knight, formerly of Petersham Lodge and the Stock Exchange," who about Christmas time had been several times requested in the Daily Post and other papers to communicate with Messrs. Searle and Glyn, was identical with the "Mrs. Sergius Trevelyan" of the provincial photographer's letter.

He had thought of her constantly none the less. The meteor-like suddenness with which she had flashed in and out of his life, the glimpse he had had into her hard-working, lonely existence, the crystalline purity of her regard, all these things he had thought of and remembered until they had become enshrined as the best part of his inner life, and his ideal love for her had grown to partake of the nature of a chivalrous knight's devotion to the fayre ladye whose favor he bore.

And through it all he was secretly certain he should see her again, and that she was destined in some way to control his life. Sometimes he laughed at himself for the sentimentality of such a conviction; he reminded himself that she had discouraged his advances, and that he had good reason to believe she was the wife of another man. But this last fact he was very loth to accept. Meantime, he was biding his time, waiting until it should please her to enter his life again, and make demands upon the service of faithful love he longed to lay at her feet.

And now within the past twenty-four hours there had come upon him, like a thunderclap out of an untroubled sky, intelligence that a certain paragraph inserted in the issue of the Daily Post on the previous day had reference to none other than "Phyllis Knight, aged twenty, fair,

gray-eyed, and until very recently resident in the Hammer-smith district of London."

The news had so shocked and startled him that he had not been home that night. At about four a. m. he had left his office for a journalists' club, where he had singled out especially one reporter and held a prolonged conference with him. Between five and ten in the morning he had learned all that other pressmen could tell him about the case in question, and had snatched a troubled sleep of two hours at the Wigwam Club. Bow street was his next resort, after he had hurriedly scanned the columns of the morning papers. Then, after a hurried, pefunctory breakfast, he had betaken himself to 4 Lockhart Cottages, which he now, for the first time, knew as the home of Phyllis Knight.

The house was empty. Such a mean, sordid little home he found it, hemmed in by the bare, high walls of the Board School buildings, hidden from the Hammersmith road by unsightly boardings, in an atmosphere of dirt and dust, shouting and screaming children and loudly gossiping charwomen and laundresses.

Clearly something was known or guessed in the neighborhood concerning the mystery which overhung No. 4, and Aylmer had little difficulty in engaging in conversation a voluble lady with rolled-up sleeves and red elbows, who freely confided to him her opinion as to the late dwellers in the cottage.

"Them two Knights was real ladies, there wasn't any doubt o' that. They kep' themselves to themselves, but I'm not one to blame them for that. The person I couldn't abide was that there old parrot-faced servant. You take my word for it, sir, if something mysterious-like comes out about that there 'ouse, Mrs. Cresswell's at the bottom of it. It ain't no good trying to persuade me as something isn't up. Pleecemen in plain clothes and pleece-

men's boots as yer carn't mistake, don't go 'anging about an 'ouse if something ain't wrong. Lor' bless you, sir, I can see as far through a brick wall as most, and if ever a woman deserved burning alive as a witch it's that there conceited, scowling, disagreeable old woman, the Knight's servant, Cresswell."

In the gathering fog and gloom Aylmer gazed at the empty house with the close-drawn blinds, fascinated by the thought that here she had lived, she whose beauty and refinement would have graced, as he told himself, the palace of a queen. The demonstrative curiosity of the neighbors drove him at length from the spot, and strolling round the block, comprising the four semi-detached dwelling places, he made his way to the back, and stared into the garden through the iron spikes surmounting a portion of the wall.

As he did so he became aware of the figure of a man lurking round the corner of the first of the cottages, clearly intent on watching him. Aylmer had already surmised that some sort of guard was being kept on the house, but for reasons of his own he was extremely curious to ascertain for himself the identity of this particular spy. He loitered about, therefore, for some moments in the fog, and deliberately lighted his pipe and stopped a passing errand-boy to ask the way to the Fulham road. As soon as he had received the information he turned as though to walk in that direction, and then suddenly doubling, found himself, as he intended, face to face with the person who had been noting his movements.

The man whom he so unexpectedly faced was clearly not an ordinary detective. A slim, gracefully built, well-dressed man, very pale, with vividly red lips under a slight golden mustache, and large melancholy blue eyes under curled black lashes—together an exceptionally

attractive-looking personage, and yet Aylmer Read chose instantly to dislike him with surprising intensity.

The man apologized, in a cultured and melodious voice, for colliding with him, and with an interchange of hat-lifting the pair parted.

"Now who in the world is that big fellow?" Darcy Der-rick asked himself, as he watched Mr. Read's retreating figure. "Can Phyllis have consoled herself in my absence with another lover? Evidently he is interested in the place from the way in which he stared about and asked questions. The infernal publicity the press gives to everything is dead against the interests of justice."

"I wonder who that pallid, effeminate-looking beast with the red lips was," mused Aylmer Read. "Certainly has was skulking about for no good. Heaven send the poor child does not run home straight into the trap laid for her!"

Going home to Regent's Park, where he now resided, was clearly out of the question in his present state of restless anxiety, and Mr. Read repaired again to the offices of the Daily Post to ascertain whether any news had come in during his absence. Meantime the fog thickened to what is known as a "London particular," and a drizzling rain began to fall. As the afternoon wore on Aylmer's agitation increased until, unable to keep in one place, he sallied out to study the contents' bills of the evening papers. Through the slippery mud of Fleet street and the Strand he passed down to the Wigwam Club in its quiet terrace overlooking the Embankment. He had meant to wait there awhile until the later editions of the evening sheets were out. But hardly had the doors of the club smoking-room swung to behind him when an overpoweringly strong impulse made him suddenly turn and leave the house, walking rapidly in the direction of Villiers street.

Before the underground Charing Cross Station, he explained to himself, he would be able to buy more papers, and that, of course, was his reason for directing his steps thither. But hardly had he turned from John street into the steep descent of Villiers street when he knew beyond a doubt why he had come.

For walking swiftly toward the Strand, with free, swinging step, clothed in deep mourning and closely veiled, was the woman whose image wholly absorbed his thoughts and whom, with all the strength of love and will, he most longed to see.

He knew her instantly before she lifted her veil and showed her face, paler and thinner than he had known it, but to Aylmer unutterably sweet and appealing. Before any other passer by had time to note its beauty, he was by her side and had drawn her hand through his arm.

"Lower your veil instantly," he said in very low, authoritative tones. "I am Aylmer Read, your friend. You must do everything I tell you and trust me wholly."

CHAPTER XXV.

HIS LIEGE LADY.

Too much astonished to resist at first, Dorothy allowed Aylmer to lead her across the road and assist her into a four-wheeled cab, which he at once chartered.

Not until he had given the direction: "Regent street; drive slowly!" and the vehicle had begun to move, did she emerge from her stupefaction at his behavior, and proceed to question him upon it.

"Mr. Read, what does all this mean? I am not going to Regent street! I have to keep an appointment with my lawyers in Buckingham street, Strand. Please stop this cab at once. I insist."

"Wait, please! You say you have to keep an appointment. Do your lawyers expect you?"

"Most certainly. I wrote to them last night, saying I would call between half-past four and five to-day."

"Giving them your address?"

She hesitated a moment.

"No," she said at last. "I did not give them the address where I have been staying for the past few days. It was not necessary, and—and I did not want to have it known. But all this really cannot concern any one who is almost a stranger to me——"

"It interests me because I am your friend. You must let me be that, Miss Knight. You are in great—in serious danger."

"What danger?"

"Have you seen the newspapers at that place where you have been staying?"

"The newspapers?" she repeated, wonderingly. "Oh, dear no! I have been staying in a cottage a long way from any town, and all I cared for was quiet. My landlord could not read, and my old servant, who stayed with me, is not much more of a scholar than he; and I was ill—very ill—for the first few days. Why do you ask me all these questions? My time is most valuable. I have left my old servant in the waiting room at the station, and as soon as my business with the lawyer is settled we start for Liverpool. To-morrow we sail for America."

"Miss Knight," he said, striving to keep his agitation out of his voice, "all your plans must be altered. Something very serious has taken place during your absence. Have you any reason for believing you have an enemy?"

She started violently; her whole manner changed and became intensely nervous and excited.

"Yes," she answered in trembling tones, "I have indeed an enemy—a man I hate and fear! Has he found me out?"

There was no mistaking the dread in her tones. Even Aylmer's vigorous faith in her received a slight shock.

"You have guessed what his action is likely to be, then?" he said anxiously.

"I know his hideous wickedness, and that he would move heaven and earth to get me into his power. I thought I had provided against everything. But if he is really on my track there is all the more reason why I should leave England at once. I can go to Buckingham street in this cab——"

"That is impossible. I see you don't understand. Your lawyer's office is as much out of the question as Liverpool. There is a warrant out for your arrest, and by to-morrow morning a minute description of your appearance and

that of your servant Cresswell will be published in every newspaper in England."

"My arrest!" she faltered. "For what?"

"On a charge of murder!"

"Murder!"

She had supposed that her personation of her sister had been discovered, and that the forging of her own will and falsification of the date was in some way to be brought home to her. But at the ugly word he uttered she felt nothing but amazement, and she repeated it, stupefied, before she could realize its meaning. Then her thoughts flew to Darcy Derrick.

"But I did not kill him!" she exclaimed. "I suppose I meant to, but he was hardly hurt at all, only stunned. And I saw him with my own eyes on the night when my dear sister died. Why, I brushed past him, almost touched him——"

"You are making a mistake. It is no man you are accused of murdering, but your sister Dorothea."

He knew that his suddenness and abruptness must sound brutal, but time was precious. Already the cab had reached Piccadilly Circus, and he had no time to choose his words.

Dorothy remained silent for a few seconds. The news seemed to stun her; she could not realize its possibility.

"Do you know what you are saying?" she asked at last in a whisper, hardly audible over the rumble of the cab wheels. "That I am accused of murdering my sister, for whom I would at any time have given my life? If it were not so dreadful I should laugh at such a thing."

"I am sure of it," he said, laying his hand upon her two hands clinched in her lap. "And of course you will face and disprove so monstrous and wicked a charge. But you had to know of it, and that was why I stopped you. If you go from here straight to your lawyer's office, as

you proposed, you will certainly be at once arrested, for your lawyer has, without doubt, been communicated with. The warrant for your arrest and that of Mrs. Cresswell on the charge of willfully murdering Dorothea Derrick on February 23, at 4 Lockhart Cottages, was applied for and granted yesterday afternoon."

"But I was not even in the house when my sister died," cried Dorothy, while tears rolled down her face at the remembrance. "Her heart was terribly weakened by her illness, and she died of heart disease. Dr. Wentworth attended her, and before then Dr. Morgan. They both know that such a charge would be ridiculous if it were not so hideous! I must see Mr. Searle, my lawyer, at once, and get him to put a stop to this insane charge——"

"I'm afraid things have gone too far for that. You see—I can't bear to tell you—but you are liable to arrest at any moment, as is your old servant. It is only by chance, aided, perhaps, by this fog, that you have come up to town in safety. Of course, you will be able to answer such an outrageous accusation fully. Do you suppose that I doubt that for a moment? But I wanted you to hear it first from the lips of a friend."

"Thank you," she said simply.

She was hardly listening, being absorbed in her own thoughts. After a few moments of silence she said suddenly, in low tones of intense conviction:

"I cannot face the charge."

He would not doubt her for an instant. He waited a few seconds for the explanation which did not come, and then said gently:

"Sooner or later you will have to do so."

"I cannot," she returned wildly. "I cannot face that man Derrick! It is he who has started this vile story, is it not?"

"Yes. He has also applied to the Home Secretary for an order to exhume the body of your sister."

She gave a sharp cry.

"My sister! Oh, horrible! Surely, surely such a thing cannot be allowed?"

"The exhumation will, I believe, take place to-morrow."

"My God!" she cried, sinking back in the cab and wringing her hands in despair. "What shall I do? How can I prevent such a horrible desecration? Do you know this man Derrick?"

"No."

"He killed my sister—oh, he cannot be punished for it—it was not open murder. He ruined her, deserted her and broke her heart, then he turned his hateful attentions to me"—she grew hot under her veil at the remembrance—"under an assumed name. When I found out who he really was I tried to kill him. Oh, I wish I had done so! But he is too wicked to kill. It is gentle, unselfish creatures like my sister who suffer, not vile things such as he! But I can't talk of him and I can't talk of her! All these things you have told me are too dreadful. I feel as though my brain were bursting."

She put up her hands to her head with a little helpless gesture. She had thrown up her veil, and in the dim, foggy afternoon light he could see that she was lividly pale and that her eyes were distended in a despairing stare. His heart ached for her, and he longed to comfort her, but he knew not how. Nevertheless, the friendly accents of his voice soothed her and she listened docilely to his words.

"You are not fit for any more disturbing experiences to-day," he said with kind authoritativeness. "Our cabman is clearly getting tired of driving up and down Regent street and some decision must be come to at once.

Do you wish to avoid arrest, or will you face the whole thing and prove its falseness now?"

She moved her head restlessly.

"I have told you," she said with a touch of impatience, "that whatever happens I cannot and will not face that man. I would rather kill myself."

He saw that she was trembling all over, and he dared not press the point in her present agitated condition.

"And Cresswell?" he said. "If you wish to avoid arrest you and she must not be seen together."

"She can be sent to her sister's at Acton, or back to her brother's cottage at Ham."

"Was it from Ham that you wrote to the lawyer yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Then the postmark might be a guide to her hiding place. She had better go to Acton."

"I will send her there at once. Please turn the cab back to the station."

Aylmer obeyed, and almost in silence the pair drove back whence they had come. Just inside the door of the underground station Mr. Reade detected through the fog the small, insignificant figure of Cresswell. Going to her, he told her briefly that her mistress was in a cab waiting to speak to her, and led her to the spot. A few hurried directions, the transfer of some money from Dorothy's purse to that of Cresswell, and the latter was piloted by the tall, young man, whom she supposed to be "one of her mistress's lawyers," down the station steps, on to the platform and into the Acton train, the tall young man having taken her ticket for that place.

"I want to tell you," Dorothy said when he returned to her, "that I have been thinking deeply. And if this—this horrible desecration of which you told me—is to take

place to-morrow, I must find some safe hiding place until it is all over and I know what is going to happen."

Clearly, she dreaded the exhumation of her sister's body. It was not alone her love and reverence for the memory of the dead which drove the blood from her cheeks and lips and brought into her eyes that strange, hunted look of fear. She was afraid of the consequences of the exhumation to the full as much as she was horrified by the proposed desecration of the dead girl's resting place. But Aylmer was vowed to her service and resolved to believe in her spotless innocence even if she should by her own mouth cast doubt upon it.

"After to-morrow," she went on in the same restless way, "I shall know what to do. But until to-morrow I must hide myself."

The dread in her mind was that her personation of her sister might be discovered by Darcy Derrick when Phyllis' dead body was brought to the light of day. She felt sick and faint with horror at the thought. To escape from him, to conceal herself had become her fixed desire and determination, and the hideous ceremony of the morrow, if it did not reveal her secret, would, at least, so she supposed, demonstrate the monstrous falseness of the charge brought against her by the malice and disappointed greed of Darcy Derrick.

She had little doubt that he had started this persecution in order to revenge himself upon the woman who had come between him and the fortune which would have been his had his wife died intestate. She did not for a moment suppose that even Darcy would really believe Phyllis capable of so foul a crime as her sister's murder. Phyllis, from whom he had received nothing but tenderness and love. That he should have dared to call in the law to assist his scheme of mean and cruel revenge seemed to Dorothy another proof that he was, as she had more

than once thought, a dangerous madman. Herein she was mistaken. The Hon. Darcy Derrick was as sane as a man of diseased egotism, overweening vanity, absolute selfishness and entire lack of moral sense can be. His aim in life was to cultivate enjoyable sensations, and there are very many enjoyable sensations to be cultivated on ten thousand a year. Still, it was hardly likely that Dorothy would look upon this matter from the point of view of the man she had married, and her horror of Darcy, which already approached the nature of a monomania, acquired an even more passionate significance as she reflected that he believed himself to be thus torturing and hunting down, not the woman who had scorned and fled from him, but her sister, who had given him her whole heart, had lived with him as his wife, and had become the mother of his child.

"It will be all cleared to-morrow," she said to Aylmer. "This mad and wicked persecution, I mean. But that man and I must not meet. Where can I go?"

The absolute confidence with which she turned toward him and asked this question touched Aylmer deeply. They were drawing westward again, but she had not heard the direction he had given to the cabman. The vehicle proceeded very slowly, the fog having grown more dense, and through the thick air sound came to them, muffled in the transit.

"I have been thinking, also," he said, "and until this terrible affair is settled, if you are determined to remain in hiding, I know no better shelter for you than my own roof. When I first met you I was living in bachelor rooms, but a little before Christmas an aunt of mine—a kindly and good-natured woman with whom I sometimes stayed as a boy at her house in Croydon—lost her husband, and, with him, the chief support of herself and her daughter. So they took pity on my loneliness, and

keep house for me in St. John's Wood, Ashgrove Road, where our home is. This will be the quietest and most out-of-the-way spot you can wish for, and I shall know you are safe. Being in a newspaper office, I can collect all news for you, and no one will dream of looking for you there."

She was silent for a moment. Then she looked up quickly.

"Surely," she said, "it would injure you if I were found in your house. Remember who I am—a woman accused of murder, and who dares not face her accuser—a stranger to you——"

"Long ago," he said, interrupting her, "I knew you would want my help some day. There is nothing I would not do for you."

His tone was very quiet, but his words startled her.

"Please, please have no illusions, no mistakes in my case," she said; "and, above all, no sentiment. All that is out of the question with me."

"I know it. I know that you are married, and the name of your husband."

"His name?"

"Sergius Trevelyan. I will tell you some other time how I found these things out. They will have nothing to do with my offer, my entreaty, that you will come and stay with us for a little while, until you can see your way more clearly."

"But the others, your aunt and cousin, they are women, and I think women are more suspicious than men. They would surely not welcome and conceal a woman who is a perfect stranger to them and accused of a terrible crime?"

"They will do just as I tell them. They are not either of them clever, and they are both very kind. But my plan is that you come as the widow of a fellow press-man, a former colleague of mine. My aunt and cousin

never saw either him or his wife, and knew nothing of my life at Clofield, where he was associated with me. His name was Philip Ransome; he left Clofield for Richmond Surrey, five years ago, married there, and has now been dead three years. He died of heart disease after one year of married life, and his widow, a very handsome woman, whom I only met two or three times, is now, I believe, teaching in Germany. You shall be Mrs. Philip Ransome. My aunt and cousin will not question you.

"I shall tell them I met you in Villiers street, coming up from the country for a few days' change; that you had been very ill, and that as you knew no one in town and could not tell where to go, I invited you to stay with us. Mrs. Ransome had been a governess and was not well off. My aunt has heard me speak of her on several occasions. Now that is all settled, and here we are at Baker street, as far as I can see through the fog. Before we arrive at Ashgrove Road you must imperatively change your dress. That heavy mourning will be mentioned in the description of you published in to-morrow's papers. We must go back to one of those big shops and buy you something different."

He made her stay in the cab while he got out, and, following her directions, laid out some money for her in a long, fawn-colored traveling cloak, with three capes, a high collar and deep "highwayman" pockets and cuffs. Even at this critical moment Dorothy's taste for the picturesque in dress did not desert her. Her small, crape-trimmed bonnet and long crape veil she ruthlessly sacrificed, on Aylmer's advice, by dropping them out of the window of the cab as they drove along, and under a wide-brimmed, black straw hat, with steel buckles and black feathers, her face, even in the dim and murky light thrown by street lamps into the cab, looked wonderfully fair and attractive.

Aylmer had to be her maid and her looking glass, and to adjust her hat, help her with her coat, and presently, when a total transformation had taken place in her appearance, had to accompany her to buy gloves, and even to advise her as to the color and style of a ready-made jersey and skirt which, at his suggestion, she purchased.

Standing by her side, in the full glare of the shop, he could not repress an exclamation of disappointment when he perceived that the beautiful gold-brown hair he had so much admired was missing. Dorothy's hair was now cut short as a boy's, and dyed a crude yellow-gold. She caught the look of dismay he directed at her altered coiffure, and blushed deeply.

"Oh, it will grow again," she said, hastily, answering his look, "and the old color will come back when I leave it alone."

He could not help smiling at her unexpected naïvete. But for the terrible charge hanging over her this would have been to him a time of unqualified joy. To have her in his care, trusting to him, appealing to his taste and judgment, obeying his suggestions, and turning the soft brilliancy of her gray eyes upon him at every moment, sent a delicious tingle of proprietorship through him. Never before had he "been shopping" with a woman. There was something supremely connubial about it, and he found himself laying down the law about the cut of a skirt and the trimming of a hat as though he had been married for years.

Dorothy appeared wholly to trust him. She had been in desperate need of just such a friend as this, loyal, kind and wise. She could not afford to distrust him, nor did it enter her mind to do so.

Eight months had passed since they had last met, and their acquaintance had been of the slightest; yet now, with a secret upon which the liberty of one of them de-

pended, it seemed to each perfectly natural and fitting that they should be together in close and restful friendship, friendship so complete that they could talk together or keep silence as it best pleased them.

"I suppose," he said presently, as, laden with parcels, they drove to a trunkmaker's shop to choose a portman-teau for "Mrs. Ransome," "I suppose I have gone shopping with you in my dreams. For I have all the while a consciousness that we have done all this before, and that it is absolutely natural that we should be here together. Does it strike you like that?"

"I feel we were meant to be friends," she said more guardedly. "I can't talk much now. The whole thing has been such a strange rush. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you. I am glad I have met a man at last who is good and honorable. I began to think all men were evil, after knowing Darcy Derrick."

He longed to ask whether her husband, Sergius Trevelyan, was among the sheep or the goats, but felt he must not venture upon such a leading question yet.

"There is one thing more," he said at last, "which must certainly be worn by Mrs. Ransome. Pardon me for noticing it, but you do not wear your wedding ring. Will it not be better to do so?"

"I threw it down a railroad embankment months ago," she answered truthfully. A thrill of quite unwarrantable satisfaction passed through Aylmer at the news.

Then he said, trying to speak in a hard, business-like manner: "We must buy another. My aunt would instantly notice such an omission."

A sudden wave of nervous self-consciousness swept over Dorothy, and the color came and went in her cheeks as she presently stood by Aylmer's side in a jeweler's shop in Baker street, and held out her finger to be measured for the wedding ring by the smiling shop assistant. To

avoid exciting attention she was forced to let Aylmer pay for it, and he needed all his self-control to disguise the strange delight with which the purchase filled him.

The smiling shopman bowed them out, interested in so handsome a couple, and Aylmer helped Dorothy into the cab and sprang in opposite her, after giving the direction:

"No. 40 Ashgrove Road, St. John's Wood."

It was past six o'clock by this time, and too dark for them to see each other's faces. Aylmer took the little parcel from his pocket, his heart thumping loudly the while.

"You must wear this, you know," he said rather huskily. "Had you not better put it on now, lest you should forget it?"

"If you like," she answered, trying hard to speak in indifferent tones.

His emotion affected her. The ungloved hand she held out for the ring was cold and quivering. He took it tenderly in his, and before she could withdraw it slipped the plain gold band on to her third finger, lowering his head so that his yellow mustache just brushed her finger tips.

She snatched her hand away, drawing her breath quickly.

"Please tell me how much I owe you for the ring," she said in matter-of-fact tones.

"More than you can repay," he answered quietly, "for the services of my life went with it. No, don't start away, Miss Knight, I have no intention of being sentimental. But the fact that you are out of my reach cannot prevent me from loving you or from being all my life your faithful servant and your friend."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AYLMER'S HOUSEHOLD.

That little break into sentiment on the part of Aylmer rather unnerved both him and his companion.

To change the subject, she began rapidly asking questions about his aunt and cousin, questions which he answered at length, so that Dorothy was in some measure prepared for the persons she was likely to meet when the cab drew up before its destination at a few minutes before seven o'clock.

It was by this time far too dark to see more than that 40 Ashgrove Road was fronted by a garden and protected by very high walls entered by one of those mysterious doors peculiar to that district of London, and which are provided with a little shutter on the inside, so that callers may be surreptitiously peeped at before being admitted. An electric bell by the door in the wall communicated with the house, and on Aylmer pressing the bell three times in quick succession the door flew open, worked from within the house.

"We are safe enough here, as you see," he whispered to Dorothy through the cab window. "Don't get out until I have prepared Aunt Harriet to welcome you."

A short walk down an asphalt path which intersected a beautifully kept garden led to the house, a small, compact, low-built residence, painted white and covered with trellis-work, and with neatly trimmed ivy and other creeping plants. The house door, fitted with glass and veiled on the inside by a beaded reed screen, flew open before

he reached it, and an extremely pretty girl in a high-necked black silk dinner-dress ran out to meet him.

"Aylmer! we were getting in such a state about you! Where have you been? Mamma's cried herself into one of her headaches. We began to think you'd been lost in the fog, or run over, or something."

He laughed.

"Surely I'm big enough to take care of myself," he said. "Besides, it isn't the first time that business has kept me away. But where is your mother? I have brought a visitor with me."

"A visitor? Is it a man?"

"No, a lady—Mrs. Philip Ransome, widow of one of my old colleagues at Clofield. She has just come up from the country. She has been very ill, and knows no one in London, and asked me to advise her where she could stay for a few days. So I could not do otherwise than ask her here. I know you and Aunt Harriet will be very nice to her. She has had a hard life of late, and I received much kindness from poor old Ransome."

"Mrs. Ransome! Oh, I have heard you speak of her. She is very beautiful, isn't she?"

Aylmer knew there was no surer way by which a man can set one woman against another than praising her looks. So he dissimulated.

"Beauty is a matter of taste," he said; "but I believe some people admire Mrs. Ransome. What is more important is that she is a very nice woman, and that she is sitting outside in the cab catching cold in the fog."

"I'll fetch her in!" cried Rosa, and seizing a shawl from the hatstand she darted out, full of curiosity to behold the unexpected guest.

Dorothy, quaking with apprehension in the cab, saw a tall, slight figure flitting down the garden path, and heard a sweet, cordial girl's voice uttering words of welcome.

"Mrs. Ransome, I am Rosa Reed; no doubt my cousin has told you about mamma and me. We are so delighted to have you. Now do run in with me out of the fog. Isn't it a fearful evening? Don't speak or you will catch cold!"

She led the way into the drawing-room immediately on the left of the hall, a charming, old-fashioned apartment, with many unexpected turns and corners, furnished in homely comfort and excellent taste; the walls covered with water-color drawings; the chairs and lounges either of the roomy, "saddle-bag" order or of cushioned basket-work. The ceiling was low, colored a warm amber, and prettily molded; the prevailing tints in the apartment were a bright gold color and a warm cinnamon-brown. Long, brown curtains hung before the wide French window, which opened upon the garden at the back, and in front of the bright fire burning in the tiled fireplace, a fender-stool, several cushions and a handsome fur rug, upon which a bull terrier and a Persian kitten were ensconced, gave the finishing touches of comfort and homeliness to the room.

Rosa Read led the visitor to the fire under the pretext of getting her warm, but in reality to have a good look at her. Rosa herself was six-and-twenty, a charming representative of one kind of English prettiness. She was not in the least beautiful, but she was undeniably pretty, her delicately-modeled retrousse nose, short upper lip and small, curved mouth; her bright complexion, bluish-gray eyes under black lashes and dark-brown hair, combining to produce a very pleasing whole.

Add to this that Rosa was very good tempered and affectionate, that she sang like a bird, and that her speaking voice was sweet as any choir boy's, and it seemed strange that in the twelve weeks since she and her mother

had taken up their abode in Aylmer's home propinquity had not led, as it usually does in the case of healthy and comely young persons of opposite sex, to love.

This thought flashed instantly into Dorothy's mind, followed by a slightly sore and hurt feeling, for which she could not account and of which she felt immediately heartily ashamed.

As to Rosa, she screwed up her pretty little mouth into an "Oh!" of admiration when she beheld Dorothy in the full light.

"Why, you are perfectly lovely!" she cried ingenuously. "And that stupid old Aylmer said something about 'some people thinking you handsome.' Fancy your having been a widow three years! I wonder you haven't been snapped up long ago. And you look so wonderfully young, too—ever so much younger than I!"

"You don't look very old," said Dorothy, smiling.

She was so greatly relieved by the informal nature of her reception that Miss Read's schoolgirl-like lack of breeding did not annoy her in the least. Besides, the girl was so pretty and her voice was so musical that her bluntness and rather bouncing manners were easily condoned.

"Oh, I'm fearfully old," exclaimed Rosa. "Do take off your gloves and warm your hands at the fire. Isn't that a duck of a cat? I shall be twenty-seven next Christmas. Isn't it dreadful? Quite an old maid they'd think me in France. And I'm always getting engaged; but somehow it never comes to anything. Dear me! How nice it is to have some one of my own age to talk to. And I do so love pretty people. The spare room is quite ready, luckily. Last week Aylmer half expected a man from Clofield, but he didn't come. We were so dreadfully disappointed. You can't think what a break it makes some one coming to stay, especially a man—no, I don't mean

that! Some women are much nicer than men, and some men are perfectly horrid, don't you think so? So fickle, and never knowing their own minds two minutes together. But now, if you are warmer, you must come upstairs and take your hat and coat off. Dinner will be ready at seven and it is nearly that now. We waited dinner for Aylmer; generally we have it at a quarter to seven, but mamma declared she couldn't eat a thing unless we had news of Aylmer. I wonder what's become of him? I suppose he's gone to try and persuade her to come down."

Little persuasion was necessary. Curiosity to see Aylmer's invited guest drove away Mrs. Read's headache, and soon as the dinner gong sounded Dorothy descended from the pretty little room assigned to her—all white enameling and brightly flowered chintz—to the dining room, to which old oakchairs and mantelpiece "fitments," blue and white tiles and china, and many oil paintings, gave a touch of stateliness, and found Rosa's mother installed at the head of the table.

Aylmer's late uncle had married his wife Harriet partly because she was an excellent, motherly body and a good manager, and chiefly because she was very much in love with him, and a pretty girl had just jilted him. Most fortunately for Rosa, she inherited her father's good looks, for Mrs. Read was more than usually plain, and her constant habit of weeping did not tend to improve her appearance.

Clad in widow's weeds, of a dull, brickdust complexion, indefinite features, and a generally limp, red-eyed and red-nosed appearance, Mrs. Read showed in her manner of greeting Dorothy a womanly kindness which touched the latter deeply and inclined her to overlook her unattractive exterior.

Mrs. Read was a great stickler for etiquette. In her "set" at Croydon, a set chiefly composed of clerks' and tradesmen's wives, much punctiliousness was observed, and she began now to elaborately apologize for any lack of preparation for Mrs. Ransome's visit.

"We'd have had the new carpet down in the spare room if I'd had the least idea you were coming," she explained to Dorothy. "If only Aylmer had telegraphed we might have made some sort of welcome. But I have been so upset by the fog and by Aylmer's not coming home that it brought on one of my headaches. Did you ever suffer from headache?"

"Hardly ever."

"Ah! then you can't tell how I feel. Since my poor, dear husband's death the least thing brings them on. It's nerves, the doctor says. My nerves were shattered by the shock of my poor Stanley's death. There you can sympathize with me, my dear, for you, too, have lost a good husband. You must feel terribly lonely."

"Sometimes I do," Dorothy said.

Tears started to her eyes. She was thinking of Phyllis, but Mrs. Read not unnaturally attributed this show of emotion to grief for the loss of the late Mr. Ransome, and was touched.

"You are not like some young widows, I see," she said approvingly. "I've known them go gadding about almost before their husbands were buried. For my part I am old-fashioned, and I can't understand widows marrying again. My heart is in the grave with my dear Stanley, and nothing could induce me to marry again."

She took out a black-edged pocket handkerchief as she spoke and wiped her eyes. She was quite in earnest and so utterly lacking in humor that it did not seem to her superfluous to assert that, being a plain and penniless

widow of fifty-four, nothing would induce her to accept a second husband.

More than one pang of remorse shot through Dorothy as she realized how unsuspectingly Mrs. Read and her daughter accepted her in the character of Mrs. Philip Ransome. Clearly it never entered into the minds of either lady to doubt Aylmer's word. At the time Dorothy did not guess how absolutely dependent Aylmer's aunt and cousin were upon him. The late Mr. Stanley Read's savings brought in an income of rather less than fifty pounds a year, which was all that stood between his widow and child and destitution. But Aylmer was constitutionally chivalrous and unselfish, and really glad to come to the rescue of the two helpless women and provide a home for them. At the present moment, indeed, he was inclined to fall down on his knees and worship the limp, mildly-weeping lady who presided at his table, in that she made it possible for him to offer shelter to the woman he loved.

"The wisest and luckiest thing I ever did in my life," he told himself, "was the taking of this house at the Christmas quarter, and installing Aunt Harriet and Rosa here. But for that how could I have helped Phyllis?"

It was all he could do to turn his eyes from his guest. She was very pale, and her eyes had not altogether lost that startled, hunted look which had come into them when she first heard of Darcy's action against her. She had changed the crape-trimmed gown she had been wearing under her long cloak for one of the two dresses she had bought in Oxford street—a silver gray silk, with a loose bodice of steel embroidery and bands of rose-color insertion. The costume had been of Aylmer's choosing. He was fond of bright, pretty colors, as are most men, and guessed how well the rose color would harmonize with the delicate flesh tint of Dorothy's complexion. The bod-

ice was cut a little open at the collar ; Dorothy's throat was round and full and of a creamy fairness.

On her neck the small face buoyant,
Like a bell-flower o'er its bed.

The lines came more than once into Aylmer's mind as he watched her across the table playing with her food, for she was far too much excited and too anxious to eat.

Toward the end of dinner a diversion came, the possibility of which Aylmer had overlooked.

Through the thick outside air the shrill voice of a boy crying out the names and contents of the evening paper penetrated faintly to the room where they were sitting. Aylmer grew suddenly pale and glanced at Dorothy.

"I hope that tiresome boy won't forget my Evening Standard, as he did the night before last," Mrs. Read observed. "I'm so much interested in that Croydon breach of promise case which is on to-day."

After dinner every evening, as Aylmer remembered with a thrill of apprehension, Rosa read aloud the day's news to her mother while the latter knitted and dozed. Would the later editions have any report of the story which would be made public on the morrow?

He was not left long in suspense. In a few seconds a ring at the front door bell preceded the entrance of the parlor maid, bringing, as was her wont, a copy of the Evening Standard to Mrs. Read, who laid it by her side until dinner was finished, and then took it with her to the drawing room.

"Do you mind if Rosa reads the news aloud to me, my dear?" she asked of Dorothy.

The supposed Mrs. Ransome had sunk on a cushion by the fire, and was smoothing the fur of the Persian cat. Her face was turned away from Mrs. Read and in the

direction of the fire as she returned a courteous answer to her inquiry. ;

Mother and daughter took their accustomed places. Rosa in a low basket-work seat, and her mother in her favorite long arm chair. Aylmer they had left smoking a cigar in the dining room, but anxiety made him presently creep to the half-open door of the drawing room and listen, holding his breath, to Rosa's bell-like tones as she read aloud the Croydon breach of promise case, and at its conclusion stopped to discuss it with her mother, while she scanned the columns of the paper for anything new or exciting.

"Here's something that looks interesting," she exclaimed at last. "The Hammersmith mystery. You remember, mamma, there was something about it in last night's paper."

"Yes, yes, of course. About two sisters, one accused of killing the other, wasn't it?"

"That's it. Listen! 'The Hammersmith Mystery.—As was stated in our latest edition of yesterday, a warrant has been issued for the arrest of the persons suspected of being concerned in the alleged murder at Lockhart Cottages. Sensational developments may be expected. The deceased lady, Mrs. Derrick, is supposed to be the same person who was recently advertised for by a well-known firm of solicitors under the name of Dorothea Knight, she having become entitled to a very considerable fortune under the will of a relative. It is now stated that within an hour of the letter announcing this intelligence being received at Lockhart Cottages on the 23d ultimo, a doctor was hastily fetched by the old servant, who is one of the suspected persons. On his arrival he found Mrs. Derrick dead. Three days later, the unfortunate young lady, who was only twenty-one years of age, was buried in Brompton Cemetery. The funeral was attended by her

husband (Mr. Derrick) and by a representative of the firm of solicitors before referred to. Both of these gentlemen had been refused admittance to the house on the pretext that Miss Phyllis Knight, sister to the deceased, who with her old servant was the only other occupant, was too ill to receive them. The doctor called in, and who signed the certificate of death from heart disease, was not Mrs. Derrick's regular medical attendant, and had only seen her on one or two previous occasions. Immediately after the funeral Miss Phyllis Knight wrote to the lawyer claiming the whole of her sister's property, under a will executed by the deceased lady a month before her death. On the strength of her representations she procured a sum of money in advance from the solicitors, and immediately afterward she disappeared from Lockhart Cottages with her old servant, and all trace of them has since been lost. Inquiries made in the neighborhood have brought to light the fact that large quantities of laudanum have been purchased from various chemists at intervals during the weeks preceding Mrs. Derrick's death by Miss Phyllis Knight. Under these circumstances grave suspicion rests upon the missing woman, for whose arrest, as has been already stated, a warrant was issued yesterday. An order for the exhumation of the body has been obtained from the Home Secretary.

"The full description of the missing women is as follows:

"'Maria Cresswell; short, dark, elderly woman; age about fifty; thin, sharp features; very reserved in manner; dressed in black.

"'Phyllis Knight, aged twenty; very tall and slender; short, dark hair, dyed golden, dark eyebrows and eyelashes, gray eyes, small features; very ladylike and prepossessing in manner and appearance. When last seen was dressed in deep mourning.'"

CHAPTER XXVII.

DOROTHY'S CONFESSION.

As Rosa finished reading, Aylmer, through the half-open door, gazed anxiously in at Dorothy.

He feared she might faint, but Dorothy was a perfectly healthy nineteenth-century Englishwoman, and her heart was as physically sound as his own. She did not faint, but she was as bad an actress in private life as she had proved herself on the stage, and so she remained, with bent head, mechanically stroking the cat's fur with her right hand, feeling all the while as though choking fingers grasped her throat.

She scarcely heard Mrs. Read's comments on the "Hammerstein Mystery." She was half-dazed by the shock of realizing how strong circumstantial evidence would be against her. Reading that account, people would actually believe that she, Dorothy, had murdered her sister for the sake of her aunt's fortune! And the cruellest irony lay in the fact that it was her own plot which lent plausibility to the monstrous theory. It would seem to outsiders quite possible for a penniless girl to murder an heiress in order to inherit her money, whereas in her own person as Dorothy, to whom Mrs. Julius Knight's fortune had been left, she would have no such incentive to crime.

"I'm sure I hope they'll catch those dreadful women."

It was Rosa who said this—Rosa, who would not have hurt a fly.

"Hanging's too good for people like that," she asserted.

"Fancy killing your own sister—and just for money!"

"But they're not sure of it, yet."

"They will be when they dig her up, and find the poison. They do find poisons in dead bodies, you know, mamma. You remember the Wickworth case? I suppose they won't hang the women even if they catch them, will they? They never do hang women now. I couldn't commit a murder. One would feel so dreadful in the dark. But think of those horrible women being at large!"

Aylmer could endure it no longer.

"Mrs. Ransome," he said, suddenly entering the drawing room, and standing in front of Dorothy while he spoke, in order to hide her face from the other occupants of the room, "you haven't seen my study yet. I know you are interested in etchings, and I have two capital artists' proofs to show you."

She looked up at him with a white, grateful face. She was glad to take the hand he offered to assist her to rise, for she was trembling from head to foot, and incapable of making any set conventional speeches.

Noting this, he talked on, scarcely conscious of what he said, about etchings and engravings and various art processes, until they had left the drawing room, and crossing the hall, had entered his own particular sanctum, a tiny study, papered in red and paneled with oak, the walls hung with etchings, and the furniture consisting of two armchairs, one on each side of the fireplace, a writing desk and seat, a bookcase, a newspaper rack, a waste-paper basket, and many brackets for pipes.

Carefully shutting the door, he led Dorothy to one of the armchairs by the fire. But she was far too much excited to sit down.

"Did you hear what they read and what they said about

it?" she asked in an excited whisper. "I never thought it would sound like that."

"I heard every word. But I knew it all before."

"You knew it! And yet you took me in? Was it out of pity? Or do you take a morbid interest in monsters?"

He could see that she was strung up to the highest pitch of excitement and so would not resent her bitter words, which seemed burnt out of her in a fire of feeling.

"I have told you my reasons," he said gently. "I should only weary you by repeating them."

"You have told me that you—you love me," she said in the same nervous, intense whisper. "But you have no idea of the real facts of the case. You called me Mrs. Sergius Trevelyan. Darcy Derrick and Sergius Trevelyan are one and the same person. He went through an illegal form of marriage with the one sister, deceiving and deserting her, and he was afterward legally married to the other. So that you see he spoiled the lives of both."

Aylmer drew a quick breath. This, indeed, he had not known. But his passionate sympathy and love for Dorothy enabled him to see into her mind. He understood that embittered as she was by the trials of fortune, she could not yet wholly trust and believe him. She was telling herself that this man who gave shelter to a suspected murderess would presently expect his pay in freedom to make love to her. The suspicion, he knew, was worthy neither of her nor of him, but it seemed to him, under the circumstances of the case, at least justifiable.

"I knew that you were married," he said, after a slight pause. "I told you so. And I wish with all my heart that you were married happily."

She looked at him doubtfully. She did not quite believe his statement, and he himself knew that it was not wholly true. He would have wished it to be so, but he

was eight-and-twenty, and human, and even honor and chivalry cannot wholly subdue the feelings of a man.

"I don't want to force your confidence," he said, "but this man Derrick or Trevelyan must be quite an exceptionally bad lot."

"He is wholly and altogether vile. It makes me sick to think of him!" she returned with passionate energy, and then, suddenly sinking down in one of the armchairs by the fire, she covered her face with her hands and began to weep.

"I'm very sorry," she sobbed. "I know a man hates to see anybody cry. But I feel broken. Please don't take any notice of me."

"Cry, if it does you good," he said gently, and, seating himself at his desk with his back to her, he pretended to be absorbed in adding together imaginary rows of figures, which he scrawled upon his blotting book.

Gradually her quick sobbing ceased. She dried her eyes and sat some moments staring into the fire, lost in thought. At last, looking up suddenly, she addressed Aylmer in sweet, appealing tones.

"Mr. Read," she said, "you must think me terribly ungrateful, but I suppose I have had too much to bear lately, and it has soured me. Will you come over here by the fire and talk to me? There is something I want to tell you."

He came at once, but found it very difficult to sit opposite her and look at her in a brotherly and impassioned way now when her lashes were wet with tears and her mouth still quivered with weeping. Grief, while it marred her beauty, lent to her appearance an appealing helplessness which went straight to Aylmer's heart. But he schooled himself to ask in level tones what she had to tell him.

"It is very generous of you to ask me no questions

about my sister's death," she said, "and it is more than generous of you to believe all I say. What I want to tell you is that I was not in the house at the time; only she and Cresswell were there, and my sister was quite alone when she died. Cresswell thought she heard her cry out, and going in she found my poor darling on the floor dead. She had cut her head in falling, making a terrible wound from which the blood was flowing. She had known she could not live long, and only that afternoon had talked to me so sweetly and so pathetically, begging me to forgive her for having deceived me about the laudanum."

"About the laudanum?"

"Yes. She had suffered terribly from neuralgia, and had got into the way of taking it when I was out to induce sleep. That is why she quarreled with Dr. Morgan, who had attended her all the time, and we had to get another doctor."

"But that report says you bought the laudanum."

"Yes. It was a mistake."

She paused. Should she reveal her identity to him, she wondered?

"That mistake is very important," he said.

"I was in a house five minutes' walk away," Dorothy went on, "but I heard my sister's death-cry in my heart, and I rushed out. As soon as I reached the street I ran against that man Sergius Trevelyan, and he followed me as I fled to the house. I feel convinced, from footmarks we found in the garden mould close about the window, that he had peered into the house, and that the shock of seeing him killed my sister. And all the time that she lay dead the lawyer's letter, which was the first intimation we had about my Aunt Dorothea's fortune, was left unopened upon the table in the dining-room. I was half mad with grief, and I knew nothing about it until

the following day, when Creswell brought it to me, and I opened it in her presence."

Aylmer sprang from his seat.

"But then Cresswell has only to appear and give evidence and your name is cleared," he cried. "She must return to town at once——"

"She must stay where she is! Unless I saw her and could instruct her just what to say she would betray me."

"Betray you?"

"Yes. Oh, Mr. Read, you must trust me not at all or all in all. I have told you the truth about my sister's death, and if you will help me to hide and later on to get away quietly from England I shall be very deeply grateful. But if you try to persuade me to face a trial, even though I know quite well I should be at once proved innocent of this hideous charge, you will drive me from your house and from the only friend I have who is willing and able to help me. And rather than be dragged into court I would kill myself!"

The white, set look of horror he had seen in her face before shadowed it again now. Aylmer saw it was vain to argue with her; and although her conduct in evading an inquiry which could only tend to prove her innocent appeared to him almost criminally foolish, he understood that it would be equally futile to reason with or to question her in her present mood.

In order to turn her thoughts in gentler channels, he rose, and unlocking his desk, drew out a parcel of photographs.

"I have a confession to make to you," he said. "The confession of a mean and paltry action. When you and I were fellow students for that brief space of time at the British Museum you once dropped in the galleries a portrait of yourself, which I picked up and detained long enough to note the name of the photographer. I wrote

at once to this man for a copy, and in his answer he told me that you had been married in his town and the name of your husband."

"Ah!"

"He had other pictures of you, he said, and I wrote for one of each kind taken. Here they are, as you see, but they are one and all extremely bad."

Dorothy caught at the pictures with a little exclamation, half joy and half pain. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she gazed at them eagerly.

"Some of them I have not seen before," she murmured. "They are so like."

"They are exceedingly unflattering."

"They are much prettier than I," she cried, indignantly, flushing with vexation.

A light flashed into Aylmer's mind.

"I have found out something," he exclaimed. "These are the pictures of Phyllis Knight, and you are not Phyllis, but her sister Dorothy."

She sprang up, facing him, with the pictures still in her hands, holding them close against her heart.

"And if I am," she cried with quick defiance, "what difference does it make?"

"Prove that, and there is no sense in these accusations."

"If I prove it," she cried, "I prove, too, that I am the wife of a creature I hate and loathe beyond the power of words. While he thinks me his victim who loved him, he is merely malignant, but if once he suspected that I am in reality the woman who left him within an hour of the marriage ceremony, I should never again be free from his detestable persecution. He would want my money and he would want me. He has a horrible passion for me, the mere idea of which sickens and revolts me. I cannot trust myself when he is near. I become changed and maddened. I hate him so much that I am not capa-

ble of restraining myself. Once already I have tried to kill him, and if the law handed me over to him I should soon become in truth the murderess they call me. If he sees me he will recognize me, and know the trick that has been played upon him and claim me as his wife; and rather than endure that I would plead guilty, he tried, sentenced, and hanged—for the murder of myself!”

She was on fire with excitement again, and before he left the house for his night work at the office she had bound him solemnly to secrecy on the subject of her identity, after which the reaction came, and she took leave of him with what looked like cold civility.

But before she went to sleep Dorothy, blushing in the darkness, kissed her wedding-ring, and slept with her left hand pillowed under her cheek. In this troubled time the touch of the ring was as that of a friend and soothed her to sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE EXHUMATION.

Dorothy awoke next morning to an unwonted sense of restfulness and well-being.

True, the morning was cold and a chilly mist hung about the air; true, she was in this house under an assumed name, a suspected murderess escaping from the arm of the law; and yet she could not feel so miserable as she had done on the previous morning when, all unaware of the hideous charge against her, she had risen from her bed in the gardener's cottage at Ham, oppressed with a sense of her terrible loss, and with no hope for the future but such as lay in the prospect of a long journey to a strange country.

Lying now with half-closed eyes, she took herself to task over this sudden lightening of her spirits under circumstances of deeper gloom than any she had yet known, and the answer to her inward questionings came with a warm flush which crept over her cheeks and throat. Through all her trials, troubles and mistakes, fate had at last led her safely to the care of a man who loved her better than all the world, the only one toward whom her heart had ever yet gone out in an instinctive sympathy, and this fact was undoubtedly the cause of her happier frame of mind.

There was more than sympathy in her thoughts of Aylmer at this moment. Circumstances had greatly favored his wooing, in that he had been enabled to appear again in Dorothy's life at a critical moment, and under

most chivalrous and love-compelling guise. He came as her true knight, her champion, believing in her innocence against any evidence, and prepared to stake his honor in her cause. Fortunately for him it was a part for which his nature suited him, and which he could, therefore, assume without bravado or self-consciousness; fortunately, also, he belonged to the physical type which was most congenial to the lady of his heart. The big and massive, the masterful yet gentle in man had always appealed to Dorothy's taste; hence probably arose her imperviousness to Darcy Derrick's effeminate beauty, and languishing seductiveness. She liked above all things a manly man, and would have preferred even a brute to a milk-sop. Her acquaintance with men was exceedingly limited. During those four years of hand-to-mouth struggle for life which had elapsed since her father's death, her intercourse with the opposite sex had consisted solely of business interviews in offices, during the course of which she had early discovered that her personal comeliness was a thing to be regretted, in that it sometimes induced her employers to offer undesirable and swiftly resented attentions, while it never for a moment led them to drive less hard bargains for her artistic work.

This discovery it was that, coming as a shock to a sensitive and refined girl, full of the illusions of youth, had imparted to her manners that veneer of coldness and pride which had sufficed to keep the art students in awe of her, and which by its unaccustomed piquancy had attracted the jaded senses of Darcy Derrick. But the natural Dorothy was neither cold nor unimpressible; she was, on the contrary, the most womanly creature imaginable, to whom loving with whole-souled strength and tenderness was an absolute necessity. The loss of her sister, who had demanded from her a mother's care and devotion, seemed to have left her life empty and blank. The

horror with which Darcy's treachery and callous cruelty had filled her for a time caused her to regard all men with aversion, but now her revulsion of feelings in Aylmer's favor led her to the opposite extreme, and inclined her to idealize him into a figure of superhuman excellence.

Happily, Aylmer Read, in the simple directness of his character and his capability of selfless devotion, was molded on sufficiently romantic and heroic lines, as knights of the nineteenth century go; between the ideal Aylmer and the real Aylmer there was no appreciable drop, and the latter was perhaps even the more loveable of the two. Toward him Dorothy's waking thoughts went out in a rush of passionate gratitude which she had been too much excited to be conscious of on the preceding evening.

"He must have thought me horribly hard and cold and suspicious last night," she told herself. "I need not be all those things with him, I know. I hope he will not love me less because of my coldness. Of course, I ought to hope he will leave off loving me altogether, as the law would pretend I belong to that horrible man just because I was trapped into entering a church and making a promise to him there under false pretenses. But I can't hope that Aylmer will leave off loving me just yet. I am so badly in need of love and of belief in men. My heart is aching and sore, and I feel after all these years of work and worry and this last terrible grief, that I want rest and comfort and—even a little spoiling with too much kindness. It won't matter in the end. I shall go away to America in a few days and try to find my brother, who won't want me, and try to make the rest of poor old Cresswell's life happy. At least, I shall be safe from the horror of that man Derrick's persecution. And before I go I shall say good-by to my kind, dear friend, my only friend, Mr. Read, and he will go back to his dreams of

me, and perhaps in time marry his pretty cousin and be very happy. That is what I have always heard men do. And I shall live abroad, a widow without ever having had a husband, and shall always wear the wedding-ring he put upon my finger."

From her window, which overlooked the garden at the back, came a sound of singing in a clear, high, bird-like voice, as joyous as a skylark's. Dorothy got up and, peeping from behind her blind, beheld Rosa in a coarse apron over a tucked-up black serge gown, engaged in digging the bare flower-beds with a large spade. She was rosy with her exertions and looked the picture of health and prettiness as she caroled forth blithely the somewhat inappropriate words:

Oh hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea!

Dorothy learned later that Rosa spent her life singing hymns, her preference being given to those of a mournful nature. Knowing but little of music, and being assiduous in church attendance, attracted thereto a good deal by the personal attractions of the curate, she instinctively broke into the tunes and words with which constant repetition had made her familiar, cheerily making the beds while chirping:

As the tree falls so shall it lie,
As a man lives so shall he die!

and working her sewing machine to the dirge-like refrain of the "Pilgrims of the Night."

It was as yet only half-past six o'clock, but Rosa's energy was insatiable. At eight o'clock breakfast she was as bright and fresh to look at as a newly-awakened baby.

"Where would you like to go to-day, Mrs. Ransome?" she inquired. "The Zoo, the wax-works, and Hampstead Heath are all pretty near. Or do you want to go right down into town?"

"I hope you won't be disappointed, but I should most of all like to stay quite quietly in the house and garden. You know I have been very ill and also much worried lately, and I feel that all I want in the world is perfect rest and quiet for the few days I shall be here."

"Ah, but Aylmer won't let you go in a few days," observed Miss Read, archly.

"Mr. Read knows I cannot stay in London long," Dorothy returned, assuming her coldest manner, but painfully conscious that she was blushing hotly.

"Now, you are not going to be nasty and disagreeable," cried Rosa, in dismay, dropping the knife and fork with which she was hungrily demolishing eggs and bacon. "Of course, mamma and I couldn't help noticing last night how Aylmer couldn't take his eyes off you at dinner, and how he afterward made himself late for his office work by shutting himself into his study talking to you. You needn't think I shall be jealous or anything like that. Aylmer and I are just like brother and sister. Of course, I don't say but what mamma will be a little bit disappointed at first. But that will soon wear off; and it's all her own fault, for what did I say to her from the first? Men never fall in love with the pretty girls who are just under their noses—they always think in such cases that what they get abroad with a lot of trouble must be better than what might be had for the asking at home. Not that," she added, quickly correcting herself, and tossing her pretty head, "not that Aylmer could have had me for the asking! He's not my style and I'm not his, and that's the truth. I like a man with a lot of fun about him and a dark mustache. Of course, Aylmer is wonderfully

clever, and has got on splendidly at his profession; but his fun, when he's inclined to be lively, is all quiet and satirical, and that sort of thing. Now, I like laughter, and I don't so much care what one is laughing at. But you and Aylmer ought to suit each other splendidly."

"I am sorry to upset your benevolent matrimonial plans for me, Miss Read——"

"Now you are talking sarcastically, just like Aylmer. And I do hate calling each other Miss Read and Mrs. Ransome. Do you object to Christian names?"

"I would very much rather you called me by my real name," Dorothy answered energetically. "My name is Dorothy, and please call me that, and never Mrs. Ransome. But I was not speaking sarcastically. I am sure you mean all you say very kindly, but I have not the slightest intention of ever marrying again.

"Perhaps you think it wicked?" suggested Rosa, looking at her doubtfully. "Mamma does, I know, but then nobody is very likely to ask her. It does seem hard on us girls who have never had one husband to find other women running through two or three. But people say everybody always like widows, because they tell risky stories and know how to manage men."

"Well, I never tell what you call 'risky' stories. In fact, I hardly know what you mean by the expression. And I haven't the least idea how to manage a man; so that people wouldn't like me."

"You are so much prettier when you laugh like that, Dolly, dear!" Rosa cried enthusiastically. "If I had teeth like yours I should be on the grin all day. You usually look most awfully sad, and it doesn't suit you a bit. When you brighten up two jolly little dimples come out one on each side of your mouth and you look about eighteen."

Dorothy was inclined to reproach herself when she

burst out laughing over Rosa's irresponsible sallies. The girl's unrefined naturalness, her naive vanity and openly expressed desire to get married, came as an amusing relief to Dorothy after a long period of over-strain on the emotions and the brain. She felt as if she could sit still all day and laugh at Rosa's nonsense, and Rosa, on her part, was charmed with so sympathetic a listener.

"I don't wonder you're in love with Dorothy," she said heartily to Aylmer, meeting him in the garden a little before lunch time.

"In love with Dorothy!" he repeated in amazement. "What in the world are you talking about?"

"Well, Mrs. Ransome's Christian name is Dorothy, and you're in love with her, aren't you? Of course she says she will never marry again, and that she treasures her wedding-ring more than anything in the world, and will never move it from her finger. But you can persuade her out of all that."

"Did she say that about her wedding-ring?" he asked eagerly, his heart taking a leap of delight. "Tell me the exact words, Rosa."

"We'd been pottering about in the conservatory," Rosa answered readily, "and we were washing our hands for lunch a few minutes ago. I asked Dolly if she took her rings off, as I do mine, to wash her hands, and she said: 'I have only one ring—this,' and she pointed to her wedding-ring, 'and as long as I live I will never take that off.' 'Do you treasure it so much?' I asked. 'Yes,' she said, quite solemnly, 'I treasure it more than anything in the world.' That was just all that passed. But you needn't be disheartened. You haven't an idea the things I've heard widows say, cracking up the dear departed and all that sort of thing, I mean, and they've always been the first to marry again directly anybody asked them."

"I am not disheartened," Aylmer said gravely. "I

have never had the smallest intention of asking Mrs. Ransome to marry me. And I must ask you, Rosa, not to discuss such a possibility with Mrs. Ransome. It is equally offensive to me and to her."

"You're wrong there," protested the incorrigible Rosa. "She didn't mind it a bit."

Immediately after the one o'clock lunch, which was served as Aylmer's breakfast, he left the house, and did not return until half-past six. Before departing he contrived to take Dorothy aside into the dining-room and beg her to wait for his return in his study, as he would be certain to bring her news of serious import.

"We must tell my aunt and cousin that I am trustee for your property, and seeing to business on the subject," he suggested.

"Yes," she answered quickly, "otherwise they will think——"

She checked herself, blushing crimson, and feeling intensely uncomfortable.

"They will think I am in love with you," he said quietly. "Well, perhaps that is the most reasonable inference to put upon our conferences—that I am trying to wean your mind from thoughts of the late Mr. Philip Ransome. Rosa, having got that idea into her head, is not likely to let it go. Meantime, good-by!"

"You had better call me Dorothy, as Rosa does," she said, following him to the door; "I keep forgetting to answer 'Mrs. Ransome.' And every little bit of deception we can do without is a gain; I do so hate it!"

"As you wish," he returned in studiously matter-of-fact tones, and took his leave.

Each was acting a part; but since the wedding-ring incident had reached Aylmer's ears he had at least the satisfaction of knowing that Dorothy's coldness was as-

sumed. Even hopeless love is better far than love unreturned.

At half-past six he drove up again in a cab, and at once sought his study, where Dorothy, pale to the lips, awaited him in speechless anxiety.

"The exhumation took place this morning," he said. "I was present when the inquest was opened. The evidence was merely formal. The body was identified by Darcy Derrick——

"As that of his wife Dorothy or Dorothea."

She stared at him with contracted brows and parted lips.

"How can that be?" she whispered. "Surely he would know! That was what I feared——"

"It was a fortnight after death and this man Derrick had no suspicion. He had only to state identification. He scarcely glanced at the body, so they told me, but almost immediately afterward he broke into a cry about his darling wife and fainted."

"Fainted!" Dorothy repeated with ineffable scorn.

"Dead off. I saw the fellow afterward and recognized him as the one I had seen hanging about Lockhart Cottages on the afternoon of the day when I found you."

"You went to Lockhart Cottages?"

"Naturally. I wanted to see where you had lived and worked and suffered. And I wanted to warn you if I had a chance."

"I shall never be able to thank you. Go on telling me about to-day."

"Dr. Wentworth deposed to being called in by Cresswell, who appeared half crazy with grief, and to finding your sister on a sofa in the dining-room. He asked about the wound in her head and was told that she had injured herself as she fell. He had twice attended her as Miss Knight, but was afterward informed that her name was

the Hon. Mrs. Darcy Derrick. From what he saw and knew concerning the state of his patient's health he had no hesitation in certifying heart disease as the cause of death. He had never prescribed laudanum for her. Until the night of her death he had not been to her house, nor had he until then ever seen her sister, who appeared, he said, so prostrated with grief that he feared for her reason and was compelled to immediately prescribe for her. The rest of the evidence as to burial, exhumation, and so on, was almost wholly formal, and the inquest has now been adjourned for a week, in order that the doctors and analysts may make their examination. Until they are completed you can do nothing but wait."

"I will obey you in everything," she said gently.

"In everything but what I most strongly advise," he said. "To face a trial."

"Do you really wish me to do that?"

Her eyes met his earnestly, appealingly.

Aylmer's thoughts flew to that sinister face, deadly pale against vivid scarlet lips, the face of the man who was waiting to claim her as his wife.

"God help me!" he murmured under his breath, turning sharply away. "I cannot advise you any more!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE USES OF ADVERTISEMENT.

The Hon. Darcy Derrick had taken a furnished flat for the season.

It was not a fashionable flat, or an expensive flat, or an abode that in any way realized that luxury-loving young gentleman's ideals of the beautiful and appropriate. But misfortunes had gathered closely over Darcy's shapely head since the time when he had with difficulty scrambled out of a Cornish ditch on his honeymoon journey in the preceding autumn.

That his sickly elder brother, Baron Derick, should have taken to himself a wife in the person of a tall, handsome and healthy Irish girl, just about the time when Darcy's bride was assisting his ignominious flight down a railway embankment, was an unpleasant possibility which had never once occurred to Mr. Derrick, and that young Lady Derrick would shortly present him with a niece or nephew was another cruel and unlooked-for blow on the part of Fate.

"It's bound to be a boy," murmured Darcy to himself, rolling his fine, blue eyes pathetically upward to the ceiling as he lay in bed in his new quarters on the day following the exhumation and opening of the coroner's inquest.

"It's part of my usual cursed luck that it should be a boy."

He was, at the moment, quite without money and was living upon debts, expectations and Jews. The first were

large, for he had ventured and lost his remaining few hundreds at Monte Carlo before Christmas, and had exhausted his mother's resources. But the hope of obtaining possession of Mrs. Julius Knight's fortune supplied the second and satisfied the third.

Private detective work was employment dear to Darcy's soul, and for which his plausibility, his sympathetic manners and his swift cunning peculiarly well adapted him. He had learned a great deal more than the police dreamed of in his peregrinations in the neighborhood of Lockhart Cottages, and in order to facilitate these researches he had taken this furnished flat not far from the Addison Road railway station.

Yesterday's proceedings had affected his delicate, sensitive organization painfully. The mere notion of having the ugly secrets of the tomb dragged to the light of day, and of being forced to identify the changed and distorted horror thus exposed as the woman he had loved and desired for her beauty, filled him with strong repulsion and shuddering sickness. From the coroner's court he had fled to the West End and had endeavored, in such delights as a dainty and expensive dinner at a fashionable restaurant, a visit to a music hall, and later to a dancing-room, to drown the memory of his afternoon's experiences. At ten o'clock this morning his head ached violently and he felt extremely cross and thirsty; but it soothed him to read, in the two Sunday papers he had sent for, sympathetic references to the "bereaved husband of the deceased Mrs. Derrick," who, "overcome by his emotion" had fainted after giving evidence of identification on the previous day.

Darcy loved to be referred to in the newspapers, to which he assiduously sent paragraphs concerning his doings at all times, when he was not hiding from his creditors. He possessed an immense scrap-book, with a pad-

lock, the key of which was never allowed to go out of his possession, in which he had carefully pasted all printed references to himself, either as the "Hon. Darcy Derrick," under which name he had published several tiny volumes of erotic verse, characterized in one specially slashing notice as being "nastier than Swinburne and sillier than the poet Bunn;" or as "Sergius Trevelyan," actor in the English provinces and the United States, the critics of which latter place declared him to be "the most weak-backed, inarticulate, expressionless and wooden apology for an alleged actor among all the incompetent dudes of good family annually foisted upon us by the played-out old country over the water;" or as "Mr. Darcy," theatrical manager and author of what newspaper men concurred in pronouncing "one of the feeblest and worst plays produced upon the English stage during the present century."

Far from being saddened or discouraged by these unflattering references to his artistic capabilities, Darcy spent many hours of his leisure in reading them and gloating over the censure so lavishly meted out to him.

"Only the French understand art, and only the Irish possess humor," he would say with a pitying smile. "And only a genius belonging to both nations, with an infusion of the Italian thrown in, can understand me!"

Now that his name and station as the Hon. Darcy, brother to Lord Derrick, were made public, he looked forward to becoming speedily the hero of the hour by reason of his connection with the "Hammersmith Mystery." It was probable that he would be interviewed, and that wood-cuts libelling his features would appear in the evening papers.

"I must get taken again," he murmured to himself as he stretched his arms out of bed and helped himself to a tumbler of soda from the siphon by his side. "None of my photographs really do me justice. Women and girls

who read about my grief and my devotion to my darling wife will sympathize with me much more heartily when they see what I am like. Of course, the reproductions in the evening papers are cruelly unlike. But with my features they can't go very far wrong?"

He lay back on his pillows, closing his eyes as he thought about his prospects. He had a trump card up his sleeve for the adjourned inquest, and in a week's time he meant to play it for all it was worth.

"I can quite understand Phyllis' determination to possess herself, by hook or by crook, of her aunt's fortune," he told himself. "No doubt she still hangs on to the vain hope that the money will be an inducement. If women only knew the exact moment when we grow tired of them, and had the sense to leave us then, we should never learn to hate them. In all my life no woman ever bored me more hopelessly than Phyllis, and she never had the brains to see it. When she learned how passionately I loved her sister, how she must have hated her! It's extremely probable that she killed her out of crazy jealousy and her infatuation for me. My beautiful, proud, fierce Dorothy, the only woman in the world for me, sacrificed to Phyllis' insane passion!"

At the thought of the possible bliss with Dorothy now forever lost to him, the ready tears welled to Darcy's eyes again, and he rang his bell for his man, that the latter might add some brandy to the soda by way of assuaging his master's grief and his thirst at one and the same time.

The servant, a slight, silent foxy-looking man, made his appearance, bearing on a tray a card, upon which was inscribed the name:

"Mr. Jack Wyverley."

"I made the gentleman give his card, sir," the servant explained, "as you particularly told me you saw no one

without an appointment. But he seems quite set upon seeing you."

"Show him in."

Wyverley and Derrick had parted company at Monte Carlo in the preceding autumn. Each had staked and lost all he could raise on the gaming-tables, but Darcy, by his mother's help, contrived to get back to England, leaving his fellow-gambler penniless and lonely at the scene of his losses. This, however, was not Darcy's fault. Niggardliness was not among his vices; he loved money solely for what it brought, and was always ready to spend it upon his acquaintances. Friends in the true sense of the word he had none. To women, old and young, he invariably made love—passionately, if they were pretty; platonically, if plain. Men either envied him for his easy love conquests, or despised him heartily and declined to associate with him. But for the approbation of his own sex Darcy cared little. He disliked being alone, because it was then impossible to talk about himself, and he would tolerate the society of a male companion in the absence of anything feminine between the ages of five and forty-five; but, although his incessant rambling talk was sometimes poetical and often paradoxically witty, he was incapable of either feeling or inspiring real friendship in the breasts of his fellow-men, and sooner or later he tired of or quarreled with them all.

This morning he wanted to pity himself aloud, and he wanted somebody to listen. Accordingly, he greeted Jack Wyverley with something approaching enthusiasm. The financial crisis through which the latter gentleman had recently passed had not in any way altered Mr. Wyverley's appearance. He was just the same short, thick-set, well-groomed and well-dressed old-young man, of red face, prominent, bloodshot, blue eyes, and fine, white

teeth lavishly displayed in a mocking grin, as he had appeared for the last fifteen years.

"Well, Darcy, you ought to be perfectly happy," he began, seating himself on the foot of the bed. "Now that your complicated love affairs have led you into a murder case, you will be talked about more than any man in London for at least a week, which I take to be your idea of happiness."

"Don't chaff, Jack. It's an awful business. I can't tell you what I have suffered."

"I should think so! Losing ten thousand a year is enough to make any man suffer."

"Do you suppose I was talking of the miserable money? I shall get that right enough, for my poor darling died intestate, and that will be a clear forgery. But it is her loss, Jack, that I feel. That can never be replaced!"

"Well, considering that in your six months of married life with her you spent together exactly one-half hour, during the course of which she contrived to chuck you out of a train, your grief really does you great credit!"

"You cannot understand. Dorothy loved me intensely in her own way. But her jealousy, when she was led to suppose that I had paid attention to her sister, was such that for the time she became a very fury, and would willingly have killed either me or herself."

"From what I have heard, she had some excuse for her jealousy."

"None whatever. Her sister was nothing to me. The poor, distracted girl had loved me, certainly; but it was solely on account of her likeness to Dorothy that I ever took any notice of her."

Wyverley's grin broadened. He drew a newspaper from his pocket, and proceeded to lay it on the bed and smooth its folds with much elaboration.

"Have you seen the Sunday Porcupine?" he asked.

"No."

"It contains a most interesting account, with a portrait, of an interview with a little soubrette actress called Leila Montgomery. I recognized her in a minute as being the made-up little person who forced her way past me up to your compartment at Plymouth station when I was seeing you off on your honeymoon journey. It's a most up-to-date interview, and will send up the circulation of the Porcupine by leaps and bounds. The headings alone are worthy the money. Listen: 'The Hammersmith Mystery.' 'Interview with Leila Montgomery.' 'She Believes in Phyllis' Innocence.' 'The Sisters' Hearts Broken by a Cowardly Seducer.' 'He Marries Them Both.' 'A Fashionable Bigamist.' 'Miss Montgomery Thinks It Was Suicide.'

"Good, all that, for a beginning, eh? And here's the interview:

"It having come to the knowledge of the Sunday Porcupine that much light could be thrown upon the Hammersmith mystery by Miss Leila Montgomery, a representative of our paper called yesterday evening upon that young lady in her residence in Camberwell, and was at once accorded an interview.

"Miss Leila Montgomery, who is a golden-haired, vivacious, little lady, of exceptionally prepossessing appearance, is at present 'resting,' in the theatrical parlance, having recently concluded a highly successful engagement as principal boy at the North Stourton Theatre. On the subject of the Hammersmith mystery she is voluble and emphatic, and she displayed much womanly feeling and affection when alluding to the accused and missing woman, Phyllis Knight. We will give Miss Montgomery's racy talk verbatim:

"Phyllis was quite incapable of cruelty,' she declared,

'and would no more have committed a murder than I would. She adored her sister and constantly spoke of her. She and I were together in a theatrical company about a year ago. Phyllis was a fairly good actress, but had only a small part. Among the male members of the company was a fellow with dyed black hair and mustaches, who called himself Sergius Trevelyan. He went in for being a "masher," used to boast about his family in a mysterious sort of way; but he was a rank bad actor, and too fond of spirits. He tried to make up to me, but I would have nothing to say to him. He was living with Phyllis Knight as his wife, having married her while the company was playing a fortnight at Sheffield; but all the company knew it was illegal, and that his wife was Miss Millie Clements, a well-known American opera singer. All—that is, all but poor Phyllis, and when at last we broke the truth to her, she went right off her head. Of course we were all sorry for her, but what could we do? She had fallen ill and had to be left behind. None of us knew her sister's address and Sergius wouldn't give it. Phyllis had a touch of brain fever, and nothing was to be learned from her, so business being business, we had to continue the tour with some one else playing her part.

"Very soon afterward my fine gentleman Sergius Trevelyan left the company. We all thought, of course, he had gone back to poor Phyllis to see her through her trouble. But not he! Several weeks later Phyllis came after the company to find him, and I myself met her on the towing path at Richmond, so changed I hardly knew her, and almost in rags.

"The brute had deserted her, and left her to starve, and we couldn't even give his address.

"And when and where do you think I next set eyes on my handsome young gentleman? Why, at Plymouth sta-

tion last September, when I was acting at Davenport and came over one Saturday for the day with the rest of the company. There was a theatrical wedding on, so we heard. The author and manager of a shocking bad piece, "Love's Right," had just been married to his leading lady, and they were starting off on their honeymoon journey. Her name was Miss Knight, so I was told, and he was the Hon. Darcy Derrick, who had come into a heap of money lately on the death of his father, and was going about the country calling himself Mr. Darcy. I'm dead nuts on weddings—no, I'm not married myself, not much!" and here Miss Montgomery shook her head roguishly. 'From what I see of you men you're not very well worth marrying!

"'Anyway, I peeped into the compartment reserved for the bride and bridegroom, and who should I see but that scamp Sergius Trevelyan, and, as I thought, Phyllis Knight, only looking every so much prettier than I'd ever seen her.

"'He'd left off dying his hair and he'd shaved his mustache; but I knew him in a moment, and he knew me, too. You should have seen his face change when I called out his name. And you should have seen her face when I said he was Sergius Trevelyan, and that I was glad to see, now Millie Clements was dead, that he'd done the right thing by Phyllis Knight!

"'The point was it was not Phyllis he had married, but her sister, Dorothy, and I certainly spoiled his honeymoon journey for him, for he never reached the end of it. You remember those paragraphs about a "Missing Bride" which appeared in the papers last September? Well, the missing bride was Dorothy. She had rolled him down a railway embankment on their way to Penzance, and while he lay there stunned she'd given him the slip and escaped.

“Then the next thing I hear is that poor, dear Phyllis is accused of murdering her sister for money, and what I say is, I don’t believe it! That man Trevelyan, or Darcy Derrick, broke her heart, and it’s just possible grief turned her brain and she committed suicide. But if you come here and tell me that Phyllis Knight was capable of committing a cold-blooded murder, and on her sister, of all the people in the world, for a wretched bit of money, I tell you you don’t know what you are talking about. It’s the man in this case who deserves hanging, and tarring and feathering first. That’s my opinion, and I don’t care who knows it.’

“What do you think of that?” asked Wyverley, who had read aloud the interview with the utmost enjoyment, putting the paper down and looking over at Darcy. “Rather a slating for you, old man, isn’t it? I must say, though, I think you richly deserve it, and you are so fond of getting yourself talked about that I suppose you don’t mind!”

But the Hon. Darcy did mind very much indeed. It was one thing to have his artistic achievements disparaged and quite another to be held up to execration and contempt as a “bad actor with dyed mustaches,” fond of spirits and cruel in his treatment of women.

He tried to console himself and to convince Wyverley by declaring that Miss Montgomery’s was the venom of a woman scorned. But Wyverley only laughed at him.

“Vanity is a disease with you, my boy, that’s the truth about the matter,” the latter assured him. “You’ll get cut in the clubs and chivied in the streets after this.”

“We’ll call on Leila in her Camberwell retreat, and I’ll get round her and make her take it all back, and say the reporter was lying,” said Darcy.

With this end in view he executed a most careful toilet, and chartering a hansom, persuaded Wyverley to accom-

pany him to what he called "the wilds of Camberwell," in order to soften Miss Montgomery's feelings toward him.

But Leila was the heroine of the hour. Every copy of the Porcupine had been bought up, and friends who had forgotten her arrived at her rooms by omnibus, by cab, or on foot, to hear at first hand her account of the events which had preceded the "Hammersmith Mystery."

The arrival of Darcy's cab was the signal for quite a demonstration, and Miss Montgomery's little servant felt that the most sublime moment of her life had come when she stood upon the doorstep and informed Darcy, in shrill tones which resounded down the street:

"My missus won't receive you, sir. 'Tain't no use your calling, for she wouldn't demean herself by talking to sich as you?"

"Hang the woman!" muttered the discomfited Darcy as he drove away from Miss Montgomery's door, followed by audible hisses from certain of that lady's neighbors and friends. "I had better have recognized her in the train that day. But Phyllis shall pay for this!"

CHAPTER XXX.

TRACKED DOWN.

An anxious week for Dorothy and Aylmer passed between the opening of the inquest and the adjourned proceedings.

Nothing of any importance was taking place either socially or politically in London at the time, and the "Hammersmith Mystery" came as a boon to newspapers in want of sensational "copy." Dorothy's short connection with the stage enabled the reporters to allude to the "Mysterious Death of an Actress," and a life-drama, which included among its dramatis personae the heir to an Irish title and more than one member of the theatrical profession, necessarily supplied headlines calculated to double the circulation of any judiciously conducted journal.

To Aylmer it was infinitely painful to hear on all sides the woman he loved and revered freely discussed, and to read items of information concerning every detail of her life chronicled in the newspapers. Public opinion was very strong against Darcy Derrick, but it was scarcely more favorable, on its feminine side at least, to the woman who had married the betrayer of her sister.

"Of course Dorothy Knight knew all about it when she married the wretch," Rosa Read declared, and Rosa was but the mouthpiece of the ordinary girl who speaks without thinking. "But some women will do anything to get married, and she almost deserved to be murdered for it."

Dorothy grew hot and cold by turns when Rosa discussed, as she constantly did, the ins and outs of the "Hammersmith Mystery," but she was wise enough to keep silent on the subject.

"I have nothing to say about it," she would remark. "But surely it is better not to judge too harshly unless we know everything."

In truth there seemed little need for so much caution. Not one member of the little household at Ashgrove road appeared in any way to connect that beautiful young widow, recovering from an illness and still a little fragile and nervous, with the alleged murderess, who, with her supposed accomplice, was "wanted" for the Hammersmith inquiry.

The secret possessed by them in common drew Aylmer and Dorothy very near together. Daily it was necessary that they should meet apart from the others, either in his study or in the summer-house at the bottom of the garden, and discuss the latest developments of the case which, in his journalistic position, Aylmer was among the first to hear. There was no doubt that Leila Montgomery's revelations had made Phyllis Knight's guilt seem only the more probable, since it supplied a second motive, that of jealousy, for her grudge against her sister. The more the story of Phyllis' sufferings was dwelt upon, the more natural it seemed that she would detest the woman who had become the legal wife of her child's father.

"It would be funny if it were not so horrible," Dorothy said to Aylmer, "that they want to take me and hang me for the murder of myself. Doesn't all this talk about me as a possible murderess, all this dragging of my life to the light, lower me in your eyes?"

"How should it? It is Phyllis, not you, whom they accuse of murder; and what I learn about your brave, hard-

working and unselfish life makes me love you a thousand times more."

She held up a warning finger.

"Haven't I told you," she said, shaking her head sadly, "that you will drive me from the shelter of your house if you speak to me in that way?"

"I know," he said, "and you are right; but when you come to think that very soon you will pass out of my life, it is a little hard and difficult to keep silent."

They were talking in the summer-house, he sitting on the table, his hands full of newspapers, she leaning back against the wooden wall of the little building. In spite of her grief for her sister's loss—a grief as deep and sincere as it had been within a hour of Phyllis' death, and as it would remain all her life—and in spite of the terrible charge hanging over her, into Dorothy's face there had crept since her coming to St. John's Wood an added color and sweetness, a dewy brightness of the eyes, and a soft tremulousness about the lips, which lent the finishing touches in which her regular beauty had hitherto been lacking.

She never denied to herself that she loved Aylmer Read. Her heart had gone out to him on that first evening when he had dedicated himself to her service. She loved him because he had saved her; she loved him because he believed in her; she loved him because he was a man after her own heart, and her time for loving had come.

All her acquired distrust of men vanished before her absolute faith in him. The little coldness and chilling speeches with which she had been used to fence around her beauty she cast aside when with him; and her faith in him was so absolute, her ideal of him so high, that Aylmer had to guard his every look and word, lest the passionate delight with which her presence filled him

should outstep the boundaries prescribed for intercourse between a single man and a married woman.

Even though she could never be his, he thanked heaven that her marriage had been a farce, and that it was Dorothy and not Phyllis whom he had chanced to love. Dorothy whose first love had been given to him.

He knew well that she loved him. She was so grateful, and withal so sincere, that she hardly attempted to disguise the feeling which shone softly from her gray eyes and which echoed through her voice when they were alone together and she spoke his name. And yet there they sat in the summer-house, hidden from the house by the laburnum trees, through the lacy leaves of which the spring sunlight danced on her beautiful face, and he dared not touch her, dared not kiss those soft lips, no longer tightly closed as of old, or fold those strong, slender hands within his own.

"Yes, it is hard," he repeated, "harder than you think."

She leaned a little toward him, clasping her hands tightly in her lap, while tears gathered in her eyes.

"Don't you think it is hard for me, too?" she asked in a low, passionate whisper, "when now for the first time I really love, to know that through my own foolish, terrible mistake, you and I can never be anything to each other, and that I shall have to go away as far from you as possible as soon as it is safe for me to leave England."

"No! don't move, and don't attempt to touch me, or I shall never forgive myself for telling you. But won't it make you happier to remember afterward that I loved you in return? That your devotion was not thrown away and unappreciated? And can't you see that loving you makes the idea of that horrible man claiming me a thousand times worse? And you couldn't come between us and save me. As he told me once, public opinion, law, society, religion itself would be all on his side because of

that fatal quarter of an hour in the church at Plymouth last September. Yet all that can't prevent me from loving you—and I do love you, Aylmer, with all my heart and soul. I am dreadfully happy in spite of everything when you are near—no, don't try to take my hand or I shall stop—I grow lonely as soon as you are out of the house, and glad before I see you, knowing that you are coming back. I suppose it would be thought wrong for me to tell you this, as I am supposed to be married to someone else. But in my heart I am married to you, and I shall wear your ring as long as I am alive. No! I forbid you to stop me or to touch me! I am going into the house now, and I don't mean ever to talk like this again. Only—I wanted you to know I am not ungrateful.”

Here Dorothy broke down altogether, and fled swiftly toward the house, evading his outstretched arms.

And Aylmer sat on the summer-house table and thought, as well as a man can think with every nerve in his body tingling with passionate love and his heart thumping like a sledge-hammer. All sorts of wild schemes flashed at a white heat through his brain, but the leading idea in them all was that he and Dorothy loved each other, and that the world believed her dead. Once the hue and cry after Phyllis Knight was over, and Dorothy could carry out her intention of escaping with Cresswell to America, what was there to prevent him (Aylmer) from accompanying them thither? In some of the States divorce laws, as he knew, were elastic, and might be stretched to meet Mrs. Derrick's case.

It was outrageously unfair that she should remain all her life bereft of the shelter of a husband's love through the treachery and villainy of such a man as Darcy Derrick. Alymer's fists clinched instinctively at the mere thought of the man. Hatred of him and overwhelming joy at the knowledge of Dorothy's love elbowed each other

in his over-excited brain. Never in his twenty-eight years of plodding, hard-working existence had such a tempest of feeling been stirred within this big, quiet-looking young man, with the herculean frame, steady, brown eyes, and drooping, yellow mustache. He had been waiting for his ideal, garnering up for her his stores of emotion; now that he had found her and had earned her love, he felt that he could sooner part with life itself than with Dorothy.

Every moment of Aylmer's time that was not spent at his office he devoted to Dorothy's service. At ten o'clock on the morning after the conversation at the summer-house he presented himself at the door of the coroner's court for Hammersmith district, an office held in a barn-like room at the rear of an old-fashioned inn close to the Suspension Bridge. The apartment was far from spacious; it was constructed of polished pine beams and lighted by four windows at the sides, by others in the sloping roof, and by gas-burners under green billiard-shades.

On the murky walls hung bills announcing a benefit concert to be shortly given in the same room, and some garishly colored advertisements of a new "blanc-mange jelly." It was a bright, windy, spring morning, and in the little, old-fashioned tea-garden outside daffodils and hyacinths were forcing their green points upward from the newly trimmed flower beds. A crowd of people had collected in the vicinity of the inn, and the bars were filled by groups of men and women, all interested in the "Hammersmith Mystery."

A hansom cab drew up, and the gates leading to the tea-gardens and stables, which had been kept closely fastened, were opened to admit two well-dressed men; at sight of one of them a storm of hissing went up from the loiterers outside.

Darcy Derrick gave a sickly smile. He was not a

physical coward, but the howl of an indignant mob is trying to the nerves of even the strongest and most self-possessed of men. As he approached the door of the coroner's court by the side of Jack Wyverley, who accompanied him from motives of curiosity solely, Derrick's glance fell upon Aylmer, and he at once recognized him as the man he had seen lurking about Lockhart Cottages on a foggy afternoon a week before, and whom he had also noticed at the opening of the inquest.

An instinctive conviction that this tall, fair man who eyed him in so unfriendly a manner was in some way deeply concerned in the case made Darcy address Aylmer as he joined him by the door of the court.

"You hear that ignorant crowd outside?" he said in plaintive accents. "If they knew a little, only a little, of the truth, they would pity me instead of hooting me."

Aylmer started as the man addressed him, and almost involuntarily drew aside as though disgusted by the thought of possible contact with him.

"If they knew a little more of the truth," he said curtly, "they might possibly lynch you."

The words slipped out, inspired by detestation of Dorothy's persecutor. But almost immediately Aylmer knew that he had done an unwise thing in uttering them. Darcy fixed the gaze of his large blue eyes intently upon him, and then whispered something to his companion, who laughed and said aloud that it was "very likely."

A few minutes later they were all inside the court, and the proceedings had begun.

Dr. Wentworth's evidence was taken first, and apparently much against his will he was questioned closely as to the state in which he found the missing Phyllis Knight and her servant Cresswell after the death of his patient, Dorothy.

Cresswell, so the tall, stiff-mannered, young doctor

stated, cried so much as to be practically helpless, while Miss Knight appeared half delirious with grief, and scarcely responsible for her actions. Later on the evidence of Dr. Morgan went to show that he had attended Phyllis—or, as she was then called, “Mrs. Trevelyan”—during the preceding year. Undoubtedly her state of health had for the time affected her brain, and her subsequent attacks of neuralgia and sleeplessness would tend to increase this trouble. The sisters appeared devotedly fond of each other, and their old servant seemed greatly attached to them. Dorothy had, so Dr. Morgan declared, nothing the matter with her, so far as he knew. Questioned as to whether he had prescribed laudanum for either sister, he emphatically denied it.

Then followed the evidence of no fewer than five chemists in the neighborhood of Lockhart Cottages, who stated that on several occasions a very tall, slender woman, of delicate appearance and ladylike manners, wearing her dyed golden hair cut short as a boy’s, had called at their shops in the evening and purchased laudanum, to allay, as she said, the pains of toothache.

Evidence as to the exhumation of the body was next given, with the results of the post-mortem examination and the analysis of the contents of the body. Amid breathless silence the wound in the head of the dead woman, a wound sufficiently serious to have caused death, was described at length, and an official analyst from the Home Office deposed to the weak but not absolutely diseased state of the heart, and to the distinct traces of laudanum having been discovered in the body.

Questioned by the coroner, the witness stated that either the injury to the head or an overdose of laudanum might have been the cause of death.

Mr. Searle, of Searle & Glyn, solicitors, deposed to attending the funeral of the deceased Dorothy Derrick, to

whom, under her maiden name of Dorothy Knight, he had forwarded a registered letter three days previously informing her that she had become possessor of the great fortune of her aunt, a late client of his firm. At the time of the funeral Mr. Searle had never met either of the sisters, but upon communicating with Miss Phyllis Knight immediately afterward he received from her the letter which he handed to the coroner, and in a subsequent interview the will, also shown, by which the whole of the deceased Dorothy's property was left unconditionally to her sister. After procuring from him an advance of a hundred and fifty pounds, Miss Phyllis Knight, acting, as she said, on her doctor's advice, left London with her old servant Cresswell, promising to communicate with him immediately and to call at his office before proceeding to join her brother in the United States. From that moment, however, he had heard and seen nothing of the young lady, and police evidence went to show that No. 4 Lockhart Cottages had been deserted, no trace of the destination of its former inmates having been as yet discovered.

At this point a tall, pale, poetical-looking gentleman, of graceful bearing and regular features, dressed in a light gray suit, volunteered to give evidence, and a murmur of disapprobation ran along the room as he gave his name:

"Darcy Derrick."

He had been parted from his wife, so he stated, and had been intensely desirous of obtaining an interview with her. On the evening of her death he had presented himself at the gate of 4 Lockhart Cottages, and had seen the postman deliver the registered letter for Dorothea Knight, before alluded to, to Cresswell, the servant, who had taken it into the house and shortly returned, bearing a receipt for it. She had omitted to secure the gate, and,

entering the garden, the witness had looked in at the window, where he had seen, not his wife, but Phyllis alone in the room, holding in her hands the registered letter.

Recognizing him, Phyllis had started up and approached the window, and he had then, so Darcy said, retired from the vicinity of the house, and had been met by his wife, who, apparently not seeing him, had hurried past him on her way home. Being exceedingly anxious to see her, he had remained in the neighborhood, and about an hour later had seen Cresswell go out weeping, and return shortly in company with Dr. Wentworth. On calling on the latter gentleman he learned to his great surprise and horror that his wife, whom he had seen alive and well only two hours before, was dead.

Tears stood in Darcy's eyes, and his voice was broken with emotion as he made these statements. He went on to admit that his suspicions as to foul play were at once aroused, and that, being convinced that his late wife did not suffer from heart disease, and having discovered that the will was a forgery, he had himself applied to have the body exhumed on an order from the Home Secretary.

Following this startling evidence came the *bonne bouche* of his own discovering—the testimony of Emma Amelia Victoria Huddleston, daughter to a laundress in the North End road. Stupid as she looked, this young woman's memory never failed her in a single particular, and her evidence was given with unhesitating clearness. Cresswell had fetched her to do a "bit of writing." A lady in the darkened sitting-room at Lockhart Cottages had shown her a folded paper, which she called a "list of furniture," and had asked her and Cresswell to witness her signature. She had thereupon written the name "Dorothea Derrick," at which Cresswell had seemed surprised, and had uttered a whispered remonstrance. The

lady, who was wearing deep mourning, and looked very ill, had turned very red and seemed annoyed. She had been thinking so much of her sister, she said, that she had signed her name by accident, instead of her own, but it did not matter, and she would alter it by and bye. Cresswell and Miss Huddleston had then signed their names, and the latter, after receiving half a crown for her trouble, had left the house. All this, she positively asserted, occurred on the day following the funeral of Mrs. Derrick, whom she had never seen, yet to whose will her signature was found appended as a witness.

At this point the Hon. Darcy was recalled, and unexpectedly questioned by the coroner as to his relations with the deceased lady and her missing sister. Phyllis, he stated, was of a vindictive and jealous disposition. Through her influence misunderstandings had arisen between himself and his wife, although, as he could show by a deed drawn up at Plymouth in the preceding year, he had settled a handsome income upon his sister-in-law to insure her silence and to keep her from troubling him.

It was late in the afternoon before the coroner commenced his summing up, and he did not fail to comment very strongly upon the unsatisfactory character of a great deal of the evidence, notably that of the deceased lady's husband, which would tend to completely destroy any possible sympathy which might be felt with him in his bereavement. In the absence of either of the two witnesses to Mrs. Derrick's death, and in the strange circumstances of their flight and the forgery of the will by Phyllis Knight, following the evidence proving that it was she who purchased the laudanum found in the body of the deceased, and, further, that it was she who received the lawyer's important letter in her sister's absence, it was for the jury to decide—first, whether Dorothea Derrick came to her death by natural means; secondly,

whether, in the over-excited state of Phyllis' nerves, and the provocation she had received in the facts of her painful domestic history, she had, in a sudden impulse either of jealousy, aggravated by the sight of Darcy Derrick in the garden, or the desire to become possessed of her sister's fortune, murdered her sister; and, thirdly, as to whether there was any evidence to prove that Maria Cresswell was an accessory before or after the fact.

After half an hour's deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of willful murder against Phyllis Knight, and acquitted Maria Cresswell of all complicity in the crime, they holding that Dorothea Derrick had met death by a blow inflicted with some blunt instrument by her sister after the latter had ineffectually endeavored to procure her death by administering laudanum in large quantities.

Evening was closing in as Aylmer, worried, excited, and weary, hurriedly left the precincts of the court, and, jumping into a passing cab, gave the address:

"40 Ashgrove road."

And close behind him in another cab sat the Hon. Darcy Derrick, tracking him home.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DARCY FINDS HIS WIFE.

Rosa Read at half-past six that evening let herself out through the garden gate of 40 Ashgrove road, her hands laden with flowers from the conservatory, intended for the Easter decoration of the church where her favorite curate officiated.

Aylmer had arrived home in a cab a few minutes earlier, and had promptly repaired to his study, where Dorothy awaited him. Rosa knew quite well that these young people were in love with each other. She was both too vain and too sweet-tempered to be jealous, but she felt, as she herself expressed it, a "little bit left out in the cold," and decided that a mild flirtation with the curate would revive her drooping spirits.

Scarcely, however, had the gate swung to behind her when she found herself involved in a thrilling adventure of the kind specially dear to her heart. Ashgrove road was thickly bordered with trees, and from under the heavy shadows cast by those on the opposite side of the way, Rosa discerned in the twilight the figure of a tall, slightly-built man, dressed in a light gray suit, moving along in stealthy fashion and accommodating his steps to hers.

Being extremely pretty, ill-bred and self-conscious, Rosa was not unaccustomed to similar attentions from admiring strangers, and she was very far from resenting them. It was Saturday evening, and on Saturdays Aylmer had no night work at his office, consequently dinner was a movable feast and punctuality not a matter of mo-

ment. Rosa sauntered along, humming the "Hallelujah Chorus" and casting every now and then glances of assumed indifference, veiling very real curiosity, in the direction of the young man in gray.

At last, as they passed into another quiet road about five minutes' walk from her home, the stranger, who had been narrowly observing Rosa's style and carriage, crossed the road and walked alongside of her for a few seconds without speaking.

A little frightened, the girl looked up. The man raised his hat and looked down into her pretty face, smiling broadly. Such blue eyes under such a length of lash Rosa had never seen before. Under their influence she blushed and gave a half smile in return. At once her new acquaintance broke into speech in a singularly sweet voice in a caressing Irish accent.

"Do, pray, forgive me," he said, deprecatingly, "but I couldn't wait for an introduction. Ever since I first saw you I can think of nothing else. I dreamed about you all last night, and to-day I have roamed about for hours in the hope of getting a word with you. You are not offended?"

He had taken the measure of Rosa's mind with perfect accuracy. She blushed and giggled.

"I really can't listen to such stuff," she said, evidently much pleased. "And besides it isn't proper from a complete stranger——"

"But why should we be strangers?" he asked eagerly. "Here is my card."

And he thrust in her hand a card bearing the name of "Mr. Jack Wyverley," and the address of a West End club.

"That doesn't tell me much," said Rosa. "I don't even know when you first saw me."

"It was in church last Sunday," Darcy hazarded.

"That's odd, for I generally see everybody in church, and I don't remember you."

"Don't walk so fast," he pleaded. "Can't I get to know your people somehow? I know something about them. Mr. Aylmer Read, of the Daily Post, I've met several times."

"He's my cousin. But he'd be fearfully angry if he knew a stranger had talked to me."

"Then don't tell him. But can't I call to-morrow afternoon? You can pretend you met me at a dance or somewhere, you know. Are your mother and sisters very particular?"

"Oh, mamma is very strict and very nice by fits and starts. And I haven't any sisters."

"If there is only your mother in the house with you I'll risk it. She's sure to have a nap in the afternoon."

"She does sometimes. But we have a visitor staying with us."

"Not a man! Oh, Miss Read, don't tell me it is a man. I shall be awake all night with jealousy."

"How dreadfully absurd you are!" exclaimed Rosa, with a little scream of laughter, deciding, as the light of a road lamp fell on his face, that her new admirer was quite the handsomest man she had ever seen. "Of course it's not a man, though it's really no affair of yours, and you mustn't detain me now. I am in a hurry to help decorate the church and be back by dinner time."

"I am not detaining you. And I must call at your house. You must invent some story to-morrow to quiet the two old ladies——"

"Our visitor is not an old lady. She is perfectly lovely, and I dare say if you were to see her you wouldn't want to look at me again."

"The woman does not exist whom I would rather look

at than you," Darcy exclaimed, with what sounded like genuine enthusiasm, gently lifting her ungloved hand to his lips and kissing it fervently. "Has this friend eyes like yours? Soft, brown hair like yours? And a complexion like yours? Tell me that!"

"She certainly hasn't very much color, and she dyes her hair," Rosa admitted, "but she has the most lovely hazel-gray eyes you ever saw, and my cousin Aylmer never looks at me when she is about. Not that I care about that!"

"I should think not! But how generously you speak of this lady's beauty! Very few girls are so nice about each other. I suppose she is an old school-fellow of yours?"

"Oh, dear, no. She is Aylmer's friend, and until he brought her to the house, a week ago yesterday, mamma and I had never seen her."

"It must be nice for you to have some one to go about with?"

"I thought it would be. But she hasn't once been outside of the house and garden since she came. Isn't it too bad?"

"Shameful! If I only had the chance I would spend every moment of my life near you! Here is the church, and this delightful walk has come to an end. Give me one of those buds you have there, just as a souvenir. When you come out you will find me waiting to see you home. To-morrow you will see me in church, and on the following day I will call at your house and tell your mother very plainly that I have fallen in love with you and mean to marry you. Won't you give me a kiss? No one will see."

But Rosa, affecting to be scandalized, ran past him to the church. A very little talk with the curate and the

girls who were decorating the altar sufficed her. She was burning to rejoin her new admirer outside the church, and perhaps inclined to be less stern than before on the subject of the kiss. But her hopes were doomed to disappointment. Scarcely had her pretty figure disappeared within the building than the Hon. Darcy Derrick pulled out his watch, glanced at the time, and set off at topmost speed for the nearest cab-stand.

"A week yesterday," he muttered to himself. "Pale, dyed golden hair, gray eyes—I think that's enough to go upon! I thought there was something odd about the interest that big press man took in the business, and my instincts generally turn out right in the end."

By the time that Rosa Read, on the tiptoe of expectation, left the church, her alleged admirer was being rapidly driven in the direction of Scotland Yard, whence he speedily returned in a four-wheeler and the company of two other men in the neighborhood of Ashgrove road.

Not a word did Rosa utter concerning her adventure to the other occupants of the house, although her increased vivacity might have shown them that something unusual had occurred. But Aylmer and Dorothy were far too preoccupied, and Mrs. Read was too unobservant to take notice of the young lady's exuberant spirits.

In his study before dinner Aylmer had detailed to Dorothy all that had taken place at the coroner's inquiry that day. Even the incident of his encounter with Darcy he mentioned, and was surprised at the importance she attached to it.

"You don't know how cunning he is," she explained. "Something in your manner may have told him that you know more than you are supposed to know about the affair."

"I couldn't answer the brute as if I liked him," Aylmer admitted. "Frankly, I could have kicked the fellow for

daring to speak to me, but any man who had read the case would have felt the same."

Dorothy shook her head, but she did not answer. She was far indeed from liking Aylmer the less because he could not restrain his contempt for Derrick, but she dreaded the latter's treacherous slyness, and her horror of him was, if possible, strengthened by the lying testimony he had that day given against her dead sister's name.

Never yet since she had sought the shelter of Aylmer's roof had she felt so anxious and frightened. During dinner she sat, eating nothing, pretending to listen to Mrs. Read's prosing, pretending to laugh at Rosa's chatter, but with all her senses strained and on the alert for some sign from the man she so feared and hated.

Before eight o'clock the sign came. Both she and Aylmer were listening for the tardy arrival of the boy with the evening paper containing the fullest account of the day's proceedings. But when the parlor maid opened the garden gate from the house in response to the lad's accustomed ring, and proceeded to unlatch the front door, there came a sudden pause, followed by the sound of men's voices speaking in low, persuasive tones in the passage.

Aylmer and Dorothy turned pale at the same moment and glanced at each other.

The parlor maid, very red, and evidently much frightened, hurriedly entered the dining-room.

"Please, sir, there's two men as wants to see the lady staying here. It's some mistake, and I've told them so; but they won't go. Will you please come out and speak to them?"

Aylmer at once rose and left the room, stopping by a gesture Dorothy, who would have accompanied him. In the hall the two men were waiting; clearly members of

the police force, alert and businesslike in manner, and perfectly respectful.

"No offense, sir," said one, proffering his professional card, "but from information received we have reason to believe there's a lady staying in this house who is wanted by the police on rather a serious charge."

"You have made a very grave mistake," Aylmer said, calmly. "I am Aylmer Read, chief sub-editor of the Daily Post, and there are no ladies in this house but three friends and relatives of my own."

"Beg pardon, sir, but in the exercise of our duty we should like to see and question those three ladies."

"It is impossible," Aylmer was beginning, but before the words were well out of his mouth he was joined by Dorothy from the dining-room, the door of which she carefully closed behind her.

She had come in the fear lest sheltering her should in any way injure Aylmer's position. She felt certain that Darcy had tracked her to earth, and that further concealment would be worse than useless, since it might only cast serious suspicion on Aylmer.

At sight of this fourth person the man who had already spoken whistled very softly to himself.

"If I'm not very much mistaken, this is the person we are after," he said. "Will you oblige me with your name, madam?"

"Mr. Read knows me as Mrs. Ransome, but my real name is Knight."

"Then I must ask you to come with us. A cab is waiting outside."

And thus, with the slightest difficulty or attempt at a struggle, was the capture of the missing woman effected, and Darcy Derrick's supreme cleverness vindicated. With more than a woman's pettiness and vanity, he possessed all a woman's quick, unreasoning intuition. He

had felt convinced that Aylmer's enmity and disdain proceeded from a personal source, and, acting on that hint alone, he had brought about the capture of the woman who stood between him and ten thousand a year.

Truly Darcy's star was in the ascendant.

At Ashgrove road Aylmer had the questions, the terror and the excited reproaches of his womankind to meet and to allay.

But the sight of the woman he would have laid down his life to protect borne away from his house a prisoner affected him so terribly that, regardless of his aunt's voluble inquiries, he locked himself into his study and ignored all feminine tappings and quaverings through the keyhole.

So poor Mrs. Read had to go to bed with "one of her headaches," brought on by baffled curiosity, leaving the elucidation of the mystery in the hands of Rosa, who, by dint of running noisily up to her room and then creeping down into the hall and waiting there on a chair for four hours and a half for any sound of movement from the study, succeeded in waylaying Aylmer as he left the room to turn the lights out in the hall.

At sight of his cousin he started and looked displeased.

"What in the world are you sitting up for?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, Aylmer, don't be cross and horrid. I'm so dreadfully sleepy! But I was so anxious about dear Dolly that I simply couldn't go to bed. Now, why don't you tell me all the truth? I'm awfully fond of her and wouldn't dream of going against her. And perhaps I can tell you something, too. When I went around to St. Ann's, just before dinner, a man followed me, and would persist in talking to me, and, as I remember now, asking a heap of questions about the people in this house. Of course, I was furious, and did all I could to get rid of

him. But you know how dark the roads are about here, and I didn't want to get murdered——"

"What sort of a man?"

"Oh, a gentleman altogether. Dressed in gray, and very, very handsome, with light hair and a beautiful, pale complexion, and enormous blue eyes and——"

"I know the brute! That was Darcy Derrick, and it was through his successful pumping of you that Dorothy has been arrested."

"But he said his name was Wyverley——"

"He would say anything. Don't cry, Rosa. It can't be helped now, and it was I who first aroused his suspicions."

"But, Aylmer—do tell me, because you know I'm not a bit prejudiced—is Dolly really and truly the murderess, Phyllis Knight?"

Aylmer turned upon her angrily.

"How can you, who have been with her for a whole week, ask such a senseless question? It is all a mistake—I may as well tell you, as it will all come out next week—Phyllis Knight is dead; the woman we know and love is her sister, Dorothy. She is hiding because she is married to that snake, Derrick, and hates the sight of him. Now, whichever way the trial goes, the law will give her to him. God help the poor child! I can't talk any more. Good-night."

All the next day Aylmer was working in Dorothy's behalf. To fetch Cresswell from her friend's at Acton was his first move, after visiting Dorothy by permission in company with Rosa. At this juncture, with Dorothy's life and liberty in the balance, there must be no more misconception as to her identity, and even she seemed to recognize this, in a hopeless fashion.

On the Monday morning early, under a drizzling rain, Aylmer stood, with Rosa by his side, before the as yet

unopened doors of the police court, a chapel-like edifice situated in a sordid side street within a few seconds' walk of the main road, among the usual crowd of dirty, bedraggled looking women in hats with broken feathers, every third woman carrying a dirtier, short-coated, pallid baby in a torn plush cape, the typical personages who invariably congregate at such times and places.

The court was not large, and as they all waited in the rain, many chance speculators drawn by curiosity concerning the much-discussed case, joined the crowd by twos and threes, under dripping umbrellas. Aylmer had left no stone unturned during the past twenty-four hours by which he could further Dorothy's interests, and had secured in her defense one of the ablest advocates in London, to whom he had on the previous day confided the true facts of the case. As to Rosa, she had begged so hard to be allowed to accompany him to the court that Aylmer had not the heart to refuse her, the more so as he had seen the truth of her argument.

"Dolly will like a woman friend to be near her. You know she almost said so yesterday."

Flushed and excited, Rosa's pretty face looked prettier than ever under her jaunty, crape-trimmed hat as she waited before the court by Aylmer's side, and her murmured talk about "dear Dolly" appeared to attract the attention of a handsome, surly-looking young man who stood near, and who, with themselves, constituted the well-dressed portion of the crowd on the steps just beyond the closed doors of the building.

Even in her genuine sympathy and liking for Dorothy Rosa was pleasantly conscious that she was exciting the attention of a man in the person of this stranger, of medium height and thick-set, deep-chested figure, who, although he lacked the effeminate beauty of Darcy Derrick, possessed undeniable claims to good looks in his well-

marked features, curly, dark hair, and especially in a pair of bright, boldly-glancing, gray eyes, with which Rosa seemed strangely familiar.

"When that creature Derrick comes into court," Rosa confided in an audible whisper to Aylmer, "it will be just all I can do not to throw something at him. What a dreadful pity he can't be hanged for something! Of course you must thrash him, Aylmer, as soon as the case is over. Thrash him and kick him! He ought to be put to death by slow torture. I'm sure I should love him to be burned alive, and watch him sizzling."

"So should I!" muttered the dark young man.

Aylmer looked annoyed, but Rosa blushed and laughed. Dignity was a quality unknown to her, and she would willingly have entered into conversation over the Hammersmith tragedy with the good-looking stranger had not Aylmer been there to restrain her.

When the court opened she was pleased to find that the dark young man was following her closely, and that he contrived to secure a seat next to her, very near the prisoners' dock, which, in shape like a very large cage open at the top, stood toward the centre of the hall, facing the magistrate's chair on a dais under a shabby crimson canopy.

The proceedings opened with the usual Monday lists of "drunk and disorderly," "using obscene language and assaulting the police in the performance of their duties," and a few cases of thieving, one of the last, which especially touched Rosa, being that of two very little girls, too small to be seen in the dock, who were led by an extremely kind and fatherly big policeman up to the table before the magistrate.

"How wonderfully short all the criminal classes are!" whispered Rosa, who was prone to generalize, in Aylmer's ear.

But Aylmer was in no mood to take an interest in anything but the case for which he was waiting, and at eleven o'clock, as had been previously announced, it came up for hearing, and in response to the direction, "Bring in the prisoner," two policemen left the hall, returning one on each side of the fairest woman who had ever stood in that court accused of the foul crime of murder.

A murmur ran through the building. People stood up, whispering and jostling each other. The magistrate, a man of keen, intellectual face, settled his pince-nez upon his nose, and gazed long and attentively at the accused woman. His son, a handsome lad of about fifteen, who sat close beside him on the bench, stared at Dorothy with all his eyes, and instantly hoped the "governor" wouldn't be hard on her. Rosa Read burst out crying, and Aylmer's heart thumped as though it would burst his ribs.

The woman he loved stood there, within a few feet of him, paler and thinner than she had appeared less than a year ago, when he had first seen her, but to his eyes lovelier still because more helpless, more appealing, and because, after one frightened look around the court, her gaze sought his, and softened and brightened as she read in his eyes the unwavering love he tried to show there.

Under her wide-brimmed black hat Dorothy's face looked wan and white. The moment was nearing, she knew well, against which she had fought so long, and the future stretched, a gray blank shrouding horrible possibilities, before her. Her head dropped forward as the formal evidence of her arrest was taken, and her pale lips could hardly form the words:

"Not guilty!"

The long tension had snapped now, and apathetically she waited for the end she knew must come. A chair was given her in the dock; after two sleepless nights she was thoroughly tired, and very soon her thoughts went

off in a waking dream, picturing what might have happened had she done what her heart prompted on that midsummer day of the preceding year, when in her cab she had been driven past Aylmer Read on her way to Charing Cross station and the start of the "Love's Right" Company.

"I believe I loved him then," she said to herself, "although I would not let myself think so. And if I had only stopped my cab and held out my hand to him, all might have been so different. I might have been his wife at this moment instead of——"

"——the whole truth. So help me God!"

Some one was being sworn—a witness hitherto unheard. With a start Dorothy raised her head and saw the tall, broad-shouldered figure of her faithful knight, Aylmer Read, to whom the oath was being administered.

Briefly, but with absolute clearness and directness, he answered the questions put to him as to his meeting with the accused in Villiers street on the Friday afternoon of the week before last, and as to taking her home in a cab to his relations.

Questioned as to why he had done this: "The accused lady is an old friend," he said boldly, "and I knew her to be innocent of the charge."

Dorothy was watching and listening to him with a beating heart. Her eyes were intently fixed on his face, so that she did not hear the slight commotion which occurred as a gentleman entered the court and took his place at the solicitors' table. But before Aylmer could frame a reply to the next inquiry put to him, Darcy Derrick sprang up from his seat, pale as death, muttering something under his breath, with dilated eyes fixed upon Dorothy's face.

The recognition had come!

Dorothy knew it, and lowered her head over her hands

folded in her lap. Nothing seemed to her to matter now. But God help that man if he tried to claim her as his wife!

She heard a buzz of talking, then the magistrate's voice, clear and metallic, speaking in raised tones:

"Not Phyllis Knight? Most extraordinary! What is the meaning of this? And who is she, then?"

Then a little, thin-faced, elderly woman in black made her way forward from the back of the court, and presently Dorothy heard Cresswell telling the story of Phyllis' death.

"And my mistress, Miss Dorothy, that is sitting over there, told me I was to say it was her that was dead and not Miss Phyllis, because she was married to a horrible, wicked man, and if he thought she was dead he'd let her alone. Miss Dorothy wasn't in the house when her sister died, and when she found her dead on the floor she was like to go mad. To accuse her of murdering her was the stupidest and wickedest thing I ever heard!"

And here, before Cresswell could be brought to book for wandering from the point, Dorothy broke down. To see Darcy's white, triumphant face and smiling, scarlet lips, to feel the possessive and caressing look from his longing eyes, as they took in greedily every detail of her face and form, stirred in her such a sick repulsion that her senses seemed suddenly to fail her. She swayed in her seat, and would have fallen had not a police officer hurried to support her. On a few words from the magistrate she was assisted from the hall, and two hours later, weak and nerveless, she entered a cab with Cresswell and Rosa Read, and drove toward St. John's Wood amid an unexpected and wholly disconcerting storm of cheering from a crowd collected outside the door of the police-court.

Rosa's delight knew no bounds. She had artlessly

confided her opinions, as the case proceeded, to the dark young man at her side, who appeared to take the keenest interest in the whole affair. As the cab door closed he pressed forward as though he would have addressed some words to Dorothy, but, seeing her evident condition of nervous collapse, he refrained, and contented himself with grasping Rosa's hand and whispering:

"To-morrow you will hear from me."

"Oh, my dear, sweet Dolly!" cried Rosa, embracing Dorothy with much warmth as the cab drove off; "I am so glad you have got off. You looked simply sweet in that horrid old bird-cage, but I was, oh, so glad when they let you out! That nice, dark young man who shut the cab-door for us—didn't you notice him?—must have a lot of feeling. He actually had tears in his eyes when dear old Cresswell told about your sister's death, and how fond you were of each other. But one thing I am sorry you missed. I don't mean the applause when the judge said you weren't guilty, though he hardly pretended to stop that, but the things he said about that Darcy Derrick's conduct. He talked about his 'callous cruelty,' and 'vindictiveness equaling his vice,' and a few horrid little speeches like that; and that Darcy creature actually took out a pocket handkerchief and howled—or, at least, if he didn't howl, he really mopped tears up like a boy who's been whipped. 'If only you were an assassin,' I said to that nice young man next to me, 'I should pay you to wait for him when the case is over and stick him in the back.' He said he shouldn't want paying. Oh, I do hope, dear, you won't be vexed with me for talking like that of a man who happens to be your husband!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

AND LAST.

Close upon nine o'clock on the evening of the same day Darcy Derrick sat alone in his flat near Addison Road station.

The result of the inquiry had been all he could desire. The woman he so passionately loved, after the fashion so peculiar to men of his stamp, was alive, and sooner or later he was resolved that she should be his. She was his wife, and he could, and would, carry her off from Aylmer Read's care at the earliest opportunity. Already he had called at Ashgrove road, and had vainly entreated, demanded and threatened on the subject of her detention, and he had since then consulted his solicitor as to the best means of getting hold of her, and had received a legal opinion every way favorable to his views. Naturally she would in time grow to love him as ardently as he could wish. Darcy was frankly incapable of believing that any woman would long continue to resist him. And in the meantime she and her fortune would be his.

Already he had arranged for detectives to watch her every movement lest she should endeavor to again slip through his fingers, and he was mentally preparing a romantic abduction by night of his own wife after a style which commended itself highly to his wholly un-English imagination.

Meantime an adoring husband, undeservedly deserted by his lawful wife, stands in need of consolation, and with this aim Darcy had caused a dainty little cold supper

a *deux* to be sent in from the best restaurant in the neighborhood, with the intention of discussing it in the company of a charming and sympathetic young person whose acquaintance he had casually made a few days before.

The visitor was to have arrived at nine o'clock, and in deference to the prejudices which a censorious world and a rebellious wife might be expected to entertain, Darcy had considerably dismissed his attendant at half-past eight, with full permission to remain away until the afternoon of the following day. The testimony of servants in courts of law, as Darcy knew, is almost invariably damaging to their masters, servants being as a rule practical and vulgar-minded persons, incapable of grasping the higher and purer side of their employers' motives.

To Darcy there was nothing incongruous in the fact that, while waiting for his expected guest, he should employ his time in writing to his mother, to tell her how cruelly his conduct had been misunderstood and maligned by the magistrate that day, and how deeply his feelings had been wounded by that gentleman's remarks.

Seated at a small table furnished with pens, ink and paper, a siphon of soda, a decanter half filled with whiskey, and a frequently replenished tumbler, Darcy felt tears of self-pity rush into his eyes, and let them splash down onto the open letter he was writing as he dilated on his wrongs. He contrived that the tears should fall where the ink was wet, because he knew the sight of their traces would touch his mother, and he felt badly in need of her sympathy.

"You, my only true friend," he wrote; "the only woman living who has ever really understood me, how you would have suffered if you had seen me sitting in court to-day a target for the contemptible sneers of a paltry English Jack-in-office, whose senses had been stirred by the sight of my wife's beauty! Her sister was barely cold in her

grave before Dorothy flew to the protection of a lover. Think of it, mother! While forging, plotting, and per-juring herself that I might think her dead, she was all the while living in this man's house at St. John's Wood, and to-day when I called they would not admit me. The tragedy of it lies in the fact that, ungrateful, deceitful and cruel as she has proved herself, I love her still. Were she really dead, as I believed until to-day, her entire fortune would be mine; but I love her for herself, and I am so overjoyed to find that she lives that I must forgive her everything. Yet consider how she has made me suffer! She has attacked me savagely, has fled from me, preferred another man to me, publicly disgraced me, and dragged my name in the dust! And I love her so passionately, so madly, that for the sake of her beautiful figure, her soft, fair skin and shining, gray eyes, her sweet voice, and the marvelous charm her whole personality exercises over me, I must forgive her and never rest until I take her to my heart, which her cruelty has gone near to break."

Darcy put down his pen at this point and read over what he had written. It was very affecting and a good deal true, and it brought tears to his eyes. He drank a tumbler of whiskey and soda, and set to work again with renewed vigor.

"When I think over my life," he wrote, "it seems to be made up of sacrifices for women. And yet only one woman have I yet met who is worthy of a sacrifice, and that is you, my tenderest and best of consolers and counselors, my sweet, beautiful mother! This is one of the darkest hours of my life, and but for the thought of your sympathy I might be tempted to end an existence which a poetic soul, an over-delicate sensibility and an intense capability for loving have rendered barren and desolate. I am not yet thirty-five, but what lies before me? I am

not a coward, and yet I shudder at the thought. I long with all my soul for peaceful, happy rest, for a dreamless 'Garden of Proserpine.' "

"From too much love of living,
And hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be.
That no life lives forever,
That dead men come back never,
That even the weariest river
Flows somewhere 'safe to sea.' "

Darcy quoted Swinburne's lines aloud as he again put down his pen. He was unusually fond of poetry, and in all his many wanderings over the face of the earth he had never failed to take with him his favorite volumes of Robert and Mrs. Browning, of Swinburne, de Musset, Tennyson and some minor poets, whose sweetness of utterance commended itself to him. His own verses were often pretty, if a little feeble and over-sensuous, and he would have liked nothing better than to be a minor poet himself, had the exercise of such a profession brought him in sufficient commercial return. Unfortunately for Darcy he possessed all the artistic susceptibilities and tastes, and was minded to indulge in all the irregularities usually associated with genius, while he altogether lacked the originative power which induces the world to overlook or condone such drawbacks on the part of its gifted sons. Had he possessed the makings of a great poet, or of a brilliant prose writer, his eccentricities would have been only what was to be expected from a genius, and the recital of them would have tended to greatly enliven and popularize his biography after death. But as it was, he felt he was misunderstood. His conduct had been pub-

licly branded as cowardly and contemptible that very day, and on leaving the police court he had been soundly hissed and hooted by an ignorant and depraved crowd, who had actually broken the windows of his hansom by the stones and lumps of mud that they hurled at him. It was enough, Darcy felt, to make a man kick the dust of England off his boots and journey to the Great Sahara, but that ten thousand a year and a beautiful wife who hates you are powerful attractions to keep a man in any country, however undeserving.

He had become so much interested in his letter that for the time he had forgotten his expected guest, so that when, soon after half-past nine, the bell of his flat was rung, he started and was almost annoyed by the interruption to his flow of composition.

Soon a smile of satisfied vanity crossed his features. He rose, and, going to the looking-glass over the dressing-table in the adjoining bedroom, he smoothed his hair and silky, slight mustache, rearranged his cravat, squirted some scent about his face and the front of his coat, shot out his cuffs, and, thus prepared for conquest, proceeded to the entrance door of the tiny hall upon which his rooms opened, and unfastened the latch.

But at this point a disappointment awaited him. Instead of the person he expected a man stood there—a broad-shouldered, deep-chested young man of medium height and dark, saturnine face, who, as soon as the door was opened, thrust his foot into the aperture and kept it there.

He was too well dressed to be a dun, so, mentally cursing him, Darcy inquired his business.

“My business is with you, Mr. Darcy Derrick.”

There was a note of dogged determination about the young man’s voice, and Darcy, without knowing why, felt apprehensive.

"If you have a writ or anything like that——" he was beginning when the stranger cut him short.

"Nothing of the sort. But you've got to have an interview with me, so you may as well let me in at once and get it over."

As he spoke, by a sudden movement he burst the door wide open, and, thrusting Darcy aside, strode into the sitting-room.

Darcy went back to the sitting-room and found the dark young man, with his hands behind his back, contemptuously surveying the supper-table. Darcy went at once to the open letter to his mother, which he had left on his writing-table, and slipped it within his desk, from the inside of which his fingers drew deftly forth something glistening, which he promptly secreted within the pocket of his coat. Then he turned toward the young man and addressed him with easy, gentle superiority.

"I am, of course, charmed to make your acquaintance," he began, "but as I don't know who you are, and my time is rather valuable——"

"My name is Sholto Knight," said the stranger, brusquely.

"My wife's brother! I am delighted to meet you. Have some champagne to celebrate the event!"

As he cut the cork, with Sholto staring fixedly at him the while, Darcy tried to remember what he had heard from Phyllis and Dorothy of the man with whom he had to deal. Gradually it became borne in on his mind that this brother was a ne'er-do-well, who had been turned out of his home and had gone abroad. Darcy had not the slightest wish to know the man, and he was wondering how he could get rid of him as he filled two glasses and offered one to Sholto.

"Drink it off," he said, "to your sister's future happiness and mine."

Sholto's fist was down in a minute, and the splintered glass flew about the room.

"You cursed scoundrel!" burst from his lips. "Do you think I'll drink with you? I've come here to give you the soundest thrashing you ever had. As soon as the news of my sister's death was cabled to New York I came over. I was in court to-day and heard the evidence, and now, you sneaking cur, you expect Phyllis Knight's brother to drink with you!"

He drew from his pocket a small, stout dog-whip, and fingered it lovingly, without once removing his eyes from the face of Darcy. The latter had grown pale, and, backing a little, contrived to put the supper-table between himself and his brother-in-law, while his fingers stealthily sought the pocket of his coat.

Before he had time to draw his revolver the lash of the dog whip was curling about his ears, stinging his cheeks, and half blinding him. Sholto's blood was up, and he did not stay his hand.

"That's for deceiving and deserting my sister Phyllis; and that's for breaking her heart and murdering her; and that's for blackening her memory; and that's for—ah!"

A shot whizzed past his head and embedded itself in the opposite wall. Sholto caught Darcy's hand before his fingers could touch the trigger again, and in dead silence the two men wrestled for possession of the revolver.

This way and that, to right and left, they swayed. Sholto had the advantage in youth, brute force and superior physical condition, but Darcy had the science of the prize-ring at his fingers' ends, and was equally deft and daring. He was fighting for his life, and he knew it. There was a look of savage, murderous hate in Sholto's eyes which was a danger signal to his adversary. Darcy hated physical cruelty, but he told himself that he must either kill the brute or be killed by him, and just at that

moment when his resistance seemed to be giving way under Sholto's savage force, by a sudden movement with his leg he tripped up his enemy and the pair fell heavily, wrestling still, to the ground.

Darcy was uppermost, and by a sharp struggle he wrenched himself free. He tried to spring to a standing position, but Sholto gripped his feet, and brought him to his knees. Kneeling thus, Darcy hurled himself upon the other man with all his force, and strove to pin him to the ground with one hand, while with the other, which shook a little by this time from excitement and fatigue, he pointed the revolver full at Sholto's head.

Before he could discharge it his hand was sharply knocked up, diverting his aim at the moment that the pistol clicked, and he fell backward without a cry.

The shot had entered his brain, and Darcy Derrick's days of evil-doing were ended.

Slowly, and shaking a little, for to take a life is not an every-day occurrence, even to a reckless man, Sholto scrambled to his feet. He did not need to examine Darcy's body. He knew the man was dead, and for that he had no regret whatever, but he did not care to look upon the sorry sight at his feet.

"He was a villain," he said, half aloud, as though exonerating himself to some one who accused him. "And he killed my sister Phyllis—poor, pretty little Phyllis! It's a good thing that he's out of the world. Dorothy's freed from him, at any rate. Now she can marry the pretty girl's cousin and have a bit of happiness. So I haven't come over for nothing.

"I did it in self-defense, but unfortunately for me they have a nasty way of calling that sort of thing murder in these infernal civilized countries. As it is, he's been writing a lot of maudlin poetry and nonsense about dying,

and he expected somebody to supper who didn't come, and he's been called names to-day in public, and his wife won't live with him, so that they may well think he blew his wicked brains out. But in case they don't, as nobody knows I've come over, I shall slip back to New York by the next boat. I'd like to have spoken to Dolly again, but it's better not. She mightn't like my having had to kill him, and some women will make themselves miserable for years over a trifle like that."

Without another glance in Darcy's direction, he let himself softly out. Fortune favored him. He slipped down the stone stairs noiselessly as he had come, and, driving off to his hotel, he speedily packed his hand-bag, paid his bill, and entered the next train for Liverpool.

A week later in New York he read the cabled account of the discovery of the body of the Hon. Darcy Derrick by his valet on the Sunday afternoon after the trial, and the verdict of "suicide while of unsound mind" returned at the inquest.

"So that's safe!" he said, drawing a long breath. "And now I can write to the pretty girl!"

Some days later Rosa Read received a letter with no address and an American postmark.

"Dear Miss Rosa," it began. "Can you keep a secret? If you breathe a word in this letter to any one, and if you don't burn it at once, you will bring a great deal of trouble upon everybody, and worse than trouble upon me. You told me at the inquiry you wanted Darcy Derrick to be flogged and killed. Well, he was flogged, and he is—dead. So you see some one had a mind to please you and satisfy his sense of justice at the same time. I hope Dorothy will marry your big cousin, and, perhaps, if you are a good girl and keep single, I will some day come over and marry you. SHOLTO KNIGHT."

Rosa burned the letter and kept its contents more or less a secret. For quite six months she lived in a flutter of romantic expectation. But all this happened three years ago. For two years Aylmer and Dorothy have been man and wife; friends, lovers and companions, they never tire of each other's society.

Rosa says they are an ideal couple, but "a bit slow." And Sholto had better hasten back, for Rosa is engaged to be married to a stout brewer next June.

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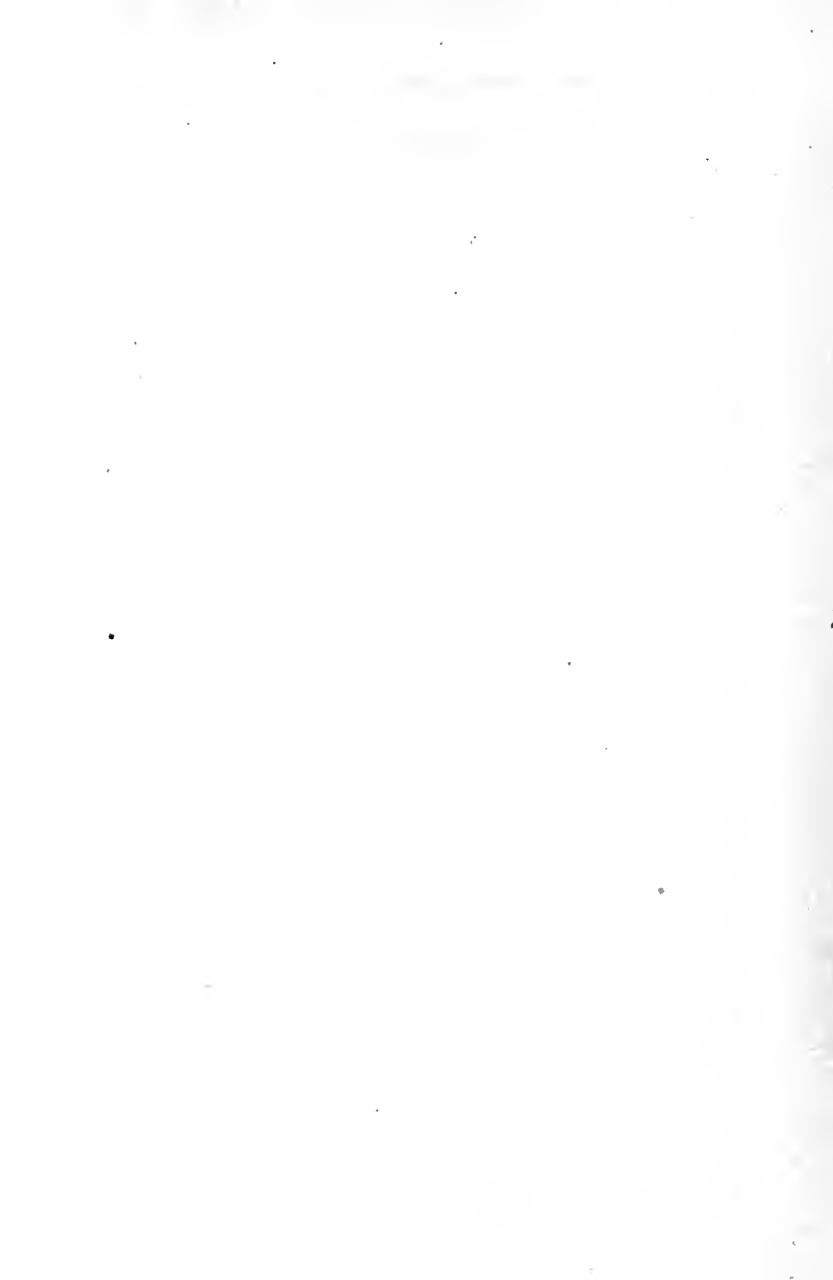
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